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DANTE, BEATRICE,
AND THE
DIVINE COMEDY

276

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2 July, 1901.



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DANTE, BEATRICE,
AND THE
DIVINE COMEDY.

BY
CHARLES TOMLINSON, F.R.S., F.C.S.,
BARLOW LECTURER ON THE DIVINE COMEDY.

*"Intendo mostrare la vera sentenza di quelle che per
alcuno vedere non si può, s'io non la conto, perch' è nascosa
sotto figura d'allegoria."*

—*Il Convito* I., 2.

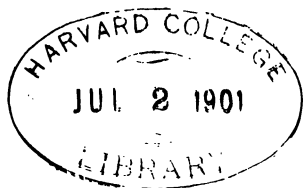
*"O voi, che avete gl'intelletti sani,
Mirate la dottrina, che s'asconde
Sotto 'l velame degli versi strani."*

—*Inferno*, Canto IX., 61.

WILLIAMS AND NORGATE,
14, HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON,
AND 20, SOUTH FREDERICK STREET, EDINBURGH.

1894.

Dm 169.3



Dante Society

"I intend to show the true meaning of those things, which cannot be perceived by any, if I do not explain it, because it is hidden under the figure of an allegory."

—*The Banquet*, I., 2.

"O ye in whom the intelligence is sane,
Do ye behold the doctrine hidden here,
Which mystic verses 'neath their veil contain."

Inferno, IX., 61.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
SIR EDWARD FRY, F.R.S., D.C.L., &c.

THIS SMALL VOLUME IS INSCRIBED

BY THE AUTHOR,

IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF MANY YEARS OF
FRIENDSHIP PROMOTED BY CULTURE.

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PREFACE.

CONFINED to my room by a chain of eighty-six links, one for each year, with failing health and eyesight, I lately opened a bundle of notes prepared for the first course of lectures on the *Divine Comedy*, which were delivered in 1878, at University College, London, under the lectureship founded by Dr. Barlow.

In the preparation of these notes I was largely indebted to Dr. Barlow's work, entitled, "Contributions to the Study of the Divine Comedy" (1864), a copy of which was presented to me by the author's friend and publisher, Mr. F. Norgate, together with a number of the Doctor's pamphlets on subjects connected with his favourite study. I also had free access to the Doctor's fine Dante library, which he bequeathed to University College.

In notes taken for the purposes of the lecture, it may not be always necessary to quote authorities. If I should sometimes be found using the words of another instead of my own, the fault is unintentional. I have, however, in the following chapters derived assistance from the works of Scartazzini and some other modern writers, including Longfellow, whose version is sometimes adopted. These

chapters represent the order in which the lectures were delivered.

I. The Commentators and the necessity for lectureships on the *Divine Comedy*. II. The profession of the Scribe in the time of Dante and Petrarch. III. The Printer and the early editions of the Poem. IV. The Poet and the *Vita Nuova*. V. Who was Beatrice? VI. Dante and Beatrice. VII. Body and Spirit. VIII. Dante's Bones. Portions of Chapters VII. and IX. have already appeared in "Notes and Queries."

During the brief progress of this little book, my sense of sight has become so enfeebled that I have not been able to revise the manuscript or to read the proofs. My work in life is finished, and I await with as much patience as I can command, the call into the Higher Life.

C. T.

Highgate, N., *July*, 1894.

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CHAPTER I.

THE COMMENTATOR.

THE name *Dante* is a contraction of *Durante*, "the Enduring," *Alighieri*, "the Wing-bearer," and certainly few poets have lasted for six centuries, with ever-increasing fame, or have attained to a loftier flight than the author of the *Divine Comedy*. But we know about as much of the personality of the poet as we do of that of the author of Hamlet. Only there is this difference between the two: Shakspeare's personality is hardly to be traced in his works, except perhaps in a few of the Sonnets; whereas Dante's very self is present in well-nigh every line of his writings. If, however, attempts be made to get biographical material out of the author's allusions to himself, commentators are by no means agreed as to their meaning, so dense is the allegorical mist that surrounds most of them.

We know that Dante felt himself moved, as it were, by a Divine impulse, to deliver to a corrupt Church, a turbulent laity, and a divided Italy, a message of reproof, exhortation, and encouragement, and he foreshadowed in the mysterious *Veltro* a regenerator, but in what capacity cannot even now be determined. He devoted twenty years to the composition of his great poem, in the hope that the completed work would so act upon his countrymen, that they would recall

him out of exile into his native sheep-fold. He says, pathetically, in one of the passages that are free from obscurity:—

If e'er it happen that the poem sacred,
To which both heaven and earth have set their hand,
So that it many a year hath made me lean,
O'ercome the cruelty that bars me out
From the fair sheep-fold, where a lamb I slumbered,
An enemy to the wolves that war upon it;
With other voice forthwith, with other fleece,
Poet will I return, and at my font
Baptismal, will I take the laurel crown.

Paradiso, Canto xxv.

The oldest, and indeed the only trustworthy notice of Dante, is by his friend and neighbour John Villani, who devoted a chapter of his History to the subject; but it is very meagre and not free from error. It mistakes the month of Dante's death, and is vague on the subject of his wanderings after his exile.

In 1363 Boccaccio wrote a little treatise in honour of Dante. He adapted Villani and drew largely upon oral tradition. He thus became the parent of all subsequent biographies; but his work is more fitted for a chapter in the *Decamerone* than for sober history. Other biographers have added conjectural material from Dante's works, and some attempts have been made to draw upon public records.

Another passage may be cited of the personality of Dante, which is free from ambiguity. It is where his banishment is foretold in *Paradiso*, xvii.:—

Thou shalt have proof how savourest of salt
The bread of others, and how hard a road
The going down and up another's stairs.

Dante named his great poem a *Comedy*, in order to dis-

tinguish it from what he deemed to be the loftier style of Virgil, which he refers to as the *Tragedy*. The term *Divine* originated in the loving admiration of the author's countrymen, and it first occurs in the Venice Edition of 1516, two centuries after Dante's death, which took place in 1321. This Venice Edition settled the title in most, if not all, subsequent issues. Previous to this the various editions bore various titles, such as *La Commedia*, or still more briefly, *Il Dante*. The Aldine Editions of 1502 and 1515 have for title *Le Terze Rime*. Two of the editions of the 17th century are entitled *La Visione*. Of course the word Comedy is not to be taken in the modern sense. Any work that ended happily might be so named, while Tragedy was applied to a work that ended mournfully.

The style of this great poem was found, even by the author's contemporaries, to be so concise, and the allusion to passing events condensed into a line or two, that lecture-ships were founded in different parts of Italy for the purpose of reading and expounding the poem, which, it must be borne in mind, existed only in manuscript (printing with movable types not having been yet invented), and the number of copies was comparatively small. Many facts recorded in the poem are of a domestic character, and might have been well known at the time they were recorded, but obscure to the next and succeeding generations, unless some contemporary commentators should have transmitted the key by which the poet's concise problems could alone be solved.

One example, out of a hundred that might be selected, will suffice to illustrate the necessity for the work of the commentator. In the *Purgatorio* (Canto v.), where the spirits desire to be remembered on earth, to which, as

they are informed, the poet will return, one of them addresses him thus concisely :—

*Ricorditi di me, che son la Pia ;
Siena mi fe' ; disfecemi Maremma ;
Salsi colui che innanellata pria,
Disposando m'avea con la sua gemma.*

Do thou remember me who am the Pia ;
Siena made me ; Maremma me unmade ;
He knoweth it, who had encircled first,
Espousing me, my finger with his gem.

In these four lines there is nothing but allusion, which could not well be explained without contemporary aid. It appears that Madonna Pia was a lady of great beauty, of a noble family at Siena. She was married to Nello della Pietra, who, being misled by false reports and unjust suspicions, conveyed her to the Maremma, a pestilential district, where in an isolated castle he shut himself up with his victim. He never told her the reason of her banishment, nor condescended to answer her questions or heed her remonstrances. He waited in cold silence until the pestilential air should destroy her health. Some say he used the dagger to hasten her end. It is certain that he survived her, and became a prey to sadness and silent grief.

Dante had in this story, as Ugo Foscolo remarks, all the materials for an ample and very poetical narrative, but he bestows upon it only four lines. Yet how pathetic are these few words ! Her first desire is to be recalled to the memory of her friends on earth ; her modest request ; her manner of naming herself, and of describing the author of her sufferings, without any allusion to his crime, but merely by the pledges of faith and love which attended their first union ; all this is expressed with much pathos and power, and all within the narrow compass of four lines.

Hence it is fortunate for us that commentaries on the *Divine Comedy* were commenced soon after the poet's death. Four years before that event he is said to have dedicated the completed portion of the *Paradiso* to Can Grande della Scala; and in an accompanying letter he lays down the principles on which his poem is to be understood, and the various meanings in which his words are to be taken, thus giving a method of exposition of which the early commentators availed themselves. The poet informs his noble patron that in the beginning of every doctrinal work there are six things to be investigated, namely—(1) the subject; (2) the agent; (3) the form; (4) the end or object; (5) the title of the book; and (6) its kind of philosophy. In three of these things, namely, the subject, the form, and the title, this *Cantica* of the *Paradiso* differs from the rest of the poem; in the others it does not. He then proceeds to state that the work is to be taken in many senses; the literal and the allegorical, which is, moral or anagogical [that is, religious or mysterious]; these he illustrates, as also the preliminary matters to be considered. The subject of the whole work is the state of souls after death, considered simply as such; but allegorically the subject is Man, who in the exercise of his free will, according to his merits or demerits, is subject to the justice of reward or punishment. The end of all and each part is both immediate and remote; but, omitting all subtle researches, it is to remove those now living from a state of misery, and to lead them to a state of happiness.

It was in consequence of the appointment of public professors of the *Divine Comedy* in Florence, Bologna, and Pisa, that several of the more important commentaries were written. Bologna at that time was the chief school of

literature and science in Italy. Her youth flocked thither from the most distant provinces. It was there that the poem seems to have been first made the subject of full professional explanation; Jacopo della Lana, Licentiate in Arts and in Theology, has left the results of his teaching in a learned commentary, which was published together with the poem at Venice in 1477, under the name of Benvenuto da Imola, a mistake which was long retained. He followed the method laid down by Dante, as did also Boccaccio, Benvenuto da Imola, and Buti. Boccaccio's commentary, or rather fragment, is the most satisfactory and efficient of any. He displays a vast amount of learning, and his style is as pleasant as if he were writing the *Decamerone*; but unfortunately he did not live to complete his work, for he only got as far as the seventeenth canto of the *Inferno*. His commentary was not printed till 1724.

The Florentine Republic issued a decree on the 9th of August, 1373, by which it was ordered that Dante's poem should be read in public and explained, and Boccaccio was chosen as the first lecturer for a fee of one hundred florins. Accordingly, on the 3rd October of the same year, in the church of San Stefano, near the Ponte Vecchio, before a numerous congregation, Boccaccio ascended the pulpit, and commenced his discourse in the following manner:—

“Human nature, although enriched by the Creator with so many privileges, is, nevertheless, so weak that it can do nothing, however insignificant, without the Divine Grace. Hence, the greatest men, whether of ancient or modern times, urge us to seek for this grace in all simplicity, and with all the fervour of our devotion, at least at the beginning of any undertaking. At the very moment then of taking upon me a burden which is too heavy for me to bear, namely, that of

explaining the learned text, the multitude of historical events, and the elevated thoughts concealed under the veil of the Comedy of our Dante, and especially before persons of so high intelligence, and of such admirable perspicacity as you are, certainly I feel more than ever the need of such aid. Hence, in order that my words may redound to the honour and glory of God, and to the benefit and consolation of my hearers, before proceeding further, I must invoke in all humility the aid of God, confiding much more in His bounty than in my merit."

Most of the commentaries prepared by the early writers and lecturers on Dante remained long unpublished in the libraries of Italy; but they did not cease to bear fruit, since they supplied the editors of the next age, after the invention of printing, with the means of explaining the difficult passages and allusions, which, as already noticed, abound in the *Divine Comedy*. These allusions, as Foscolo remarks with some exaggeration of figure, are "rapid, various, multiplied, succeeding each other with the rapidity of flashes of lightning, which leave short intervals of darkness between them. It is the duty of the commentator to throw light upon these dark intervals."

During the latter years of Dante's life, his sons, Pietro and Jacopo, lived with him at Ravenna; and from the deep interest which they took in the poem, it might have been supposed that they alone were able to explain those symbolical and difficult passages which the poet thought necessary to introduce. But the gloss on the *Inferno*, attributed to Jacopo, and some other anonymous glosses of early date, which, by the liberality of Lord Vernon, were printed at Florence in 1848, contain no information of much, if any, value. A more important commentary,

ascribed to Pietro Alighieri, supposed to have been written in 1340, was also printed at the expense of Lord Vernon.

Boccaccio relates a strange circumstance respecting Jacopo, which reads more like a page of romance than of sober history. He says that when Dante was writing the *Paradiso*, it was his custom to send a few cantos at a time, as they were finished, to Messer Can della Scala, who, having read them, ordered copies to be made. In this way all but the last thirteen cantos reached Messer Can, when the poet died, without having mentioned these concluding cantos to anyone. Dante's sons searched diligently for them, but could not find them; whereupon several of their friends requested them to finish the poem. They had actually commenced their presumptuous task, when a vision appeared to Jacopo, who was the more ardent of the two in the matter, which revealed to him where the missing cantos were to be found. In the ninth month after the poet's decease, one night, near the hour of Matins, Jacopo went to the house of one Pietro Giardino, of Ravenna, an earnest disciple of Dante, and told him that in his sleep he had just seen a figure of his father, clad in white raiment, and his face shining with a supernatural light; and that on his asking if he were still alive, he replied, "Yes; but with the true life, not with the life of this world." Whereupon he asked him if he had finished his work before he departed to the true life; and if he had, what he had done with the concluding cantos, since they could nowhere be found. "Yes, I finished it," answered the luminous figure; and forthwith taking the hand of his son, led him to the chamber where he had been accustomed to sleep, and, touching a part of the wall, said, "Here is that which you have so

long sought for." These words having been spoken, the dream came to an end. Jacopo was so affected that he immediately arose and sought out his friend Pietro Giardino, and having related his dream, begged him to accompany him to the place indicated. So they went together, it being still dark, to the house where Dante died, and calling up the master, they proceeded to the place pointed out. There was a piece of matting fastened against the wall, as they had already noticed when Dante lived there. On removing it, an opening was discovered behind, and in it were found many writings which had become mouldy from the damp, and would have perished had they remained there much longer. Having carefully cleaned them, they perceived to their joy the missing cantos. These they gladly copied, and sent to Messer Can, and thus the labour of so many years was rendered perfect. Boccaccio relates this story on the authority of the above-named Pietro Giardino, of Ravenna. The story may be accepted in the sense in which it is told. The mind of Jacopo was deeply interested in the subject, he was well acquainted with the room in which his father had worked, and the dream completed what was really a mental prepossession.

The commentary known as the *Ottimo* was, about 1334, in the possession of Giotto the painter, an intimate friend of Dante. It is doubtful who was the author; some suppose that it was Jacopo della Lana, others Dante's son Jacopo. Whoever it was, he must have had intimate personal relations with the poet, for he remarks on *Inferno*, X., 85, "I, the writer, have heard Dante declare that he was never led by rhyme to say other than what he intended, but that he often caused his words to signify different senses to those in which they were used by other poets." He also

defends Dante against the misrepresentation of Bambagioli's comment on *Inferno*, vii., 89, where Fortune is described. He says :—"According to the discretion of my youth, I will describe something in defence of, and for the conservation of the honour and fame of this venerable author, so that by the infamy of the envious and by evil-speakers, no one may detract and derogate from his true science and virtue." He then gives an account of Fortune more in harmony with the poet's meaning. The *Ottimo Codex* is in the Laurentian Library of Florence. It is a large folio volume of 175 leaves of parchment, with the text in the middle of the page, surrounded by the commentary in smaller characters.

When Boccaccio in 1333 commenced his course of public readings, his friend Benvenuto da Imola hastened to hear him. Two years after this Benvenuto was called to Bologna to exercise a similar office; and so numerous were his hearers that the professor had frequently to deliver his lecture in the public square of the city. The substance of these lectures was, at the request of Petrarch, formed into a commentary, which to a certain extent supplies what is wanting in that of Boccaccio.

In the same year in which Benvenuto opened his course at Bologna, an unknown author was writing a commentary which is known as that of "the false Boccaccio," but it has neither the language nor the learning of the author of the *Decamerone*. This writer gives a summary of what in his time was understood by the *Veltro*, who is foretold in the first canto of the *Inferno* as the regenerator of Italy. He says, "Some hold that he will be an Emperor who will come to live in Rome, and drive the unworthy pastors from holy Church, putting good and saintly ones in their places, and will thus make a reform in Italy. Others consider

that Jesus Christ is meant, coming at the Last Day to judge the world, when pride, avarice, and lust, with every other vice, will be sent along with all sinners to the infernal regions. Some think that a Pope is intended, so just and good that he will purify holy Church, and take care that her pastors lead virtuous lives ; but I do not believe this."

In the second half of the fourteenth century Francesco di Bartolo da Buti read and expounded the *Divine Comedy* in the University of Pisa. The commentary which resulted therefrom is the most voluminous of all. It was completed in 1385, and is described as a mine of literary wealth, which for faithful and conscientious exposition of the text has not been surpassed. Landino, in his edition of 1481, made considerable use of this commentary, and Landino's work, according to Professor Witte, is the first real critical production for fixing the reading of the text, and for determining the meaning of the poet.

Lectureships were also founded in other cities of Italy ; and it is worthy of remark, as characteristic of the age, and of the high veneration in which Italy held her first national poet, that these lectures were invested with a certain religious character by being delivered in churches, and as much as possible on the days of great Christian festivals, when the crowded congregations, already under the influence of religious emotion, were in a fit state of mind to listen to the solemn strains of the great poet who, according to the popular belief, had actually been in Hell, in Purgatory, and in Paradise, and described what he witnessed there. Indeed, when Dante was in Verona, the people in the streets regarded him with awe as the man who had actually been in Hell.

CHAPTER II.

THE SCRIBE.

THE art of printing with movable type was not invented until 1450, so that in the time of Dante, and for upwards of a century later, books had to be written and multiplied by the hand of the scribe. It is difficult for the student to realise the condition of the literary world at that time, but we may suppose as an example that Milton's great poem existed in manuscript, and that we desired to possess a copy; we should find some difficulty in borrowing one, and if we succeeded, we should have to give security for its safe return, lest it should share the fate of Ser Filippo Landi's copy of Dante, which is to be seen in the Barberini Library, a folio on parchment, bearing date 1419. The writer states that this copy was made for his own use only, having lost a previous copy by lending it to a friend, who said he had returned it when he had not, and thus he lost both his book and his friend. Consequently, he says, "this copy will not be lent to anyone, and, therefore, no one must seek to borrow it." Opposite to a list of the cantos is a sonnet with reference to the loss of the former copy. But to return to our Milton, we should have to spend months upon months in painfully transcribing the text of *Paradise Lost*. But as every state and condition has its compensations, I

am not sure that this would not be a more healthful intellectual exercise than skimming over in the same time a hundred volumes from the circulating library, which is a mischievous habit of the present day. Or if we were sufficiently wealthy to engage a professional scribe, we should probably meet with vexation and disappointment, such as Petrarch describes in dealing with the copyists of his time. He says in one of his letters, "They promise much, perform little, and spoil all." And again, "If you have not received my verses, it is not on account of my negligence, but of that of the copyists, who constantly disappoint me, so that my studies suffer greatly on their account. They not only break their promises, but keep the trifles entrusted to them, pretending they are lost; so that I must either become their slave, or cease to employ them." In apologising to a friend for having kept his Cicero upwards of four years in order that he might copy it with his own hand, he laments the dearth of copyists capable of undertaking such a work. "This," he says, "occasions great loss to literature, since works already obscure are rendered unintelligible by them. In this way many treasures are lost." In reply to an application for a copy of his treatise *De Vitâ Solitariâ*, he writes, "God is my witness that ten times and upwards I have endeavoured, if the style were not such as to give pleasure to the mind and the ear, that at least the written characters should please the eye; but all my attempts to overcome the well-known evasions of that part of the literary world known as the copyists have been vain. It may appear incredible that a work that required only a few months for its composition cannot be copied in as many years. After many delays I left it as good as copied in the hands of a priest. I know not whether his promise will be held sacred as befits

his sacred character, or be as fallacious as that of a copyist." In sending his poems to his friend Pandolfo Malatesta, he apologises for the bad writing on account of the difficulty of finding a copyist, and he remarks on the scarcity of those who devote themselves to this occupation, and the idleness of those who do.

It is remarkable how large a portion of their time Petrarch and other literary men of that period gave up to the copying of works of importance. Boccaccio transcribed the whole of the *Divine Comedy*, and sent it as a present to Petrarch ; and Petrarch endeavoured to console himself for the labour of copying by the necessity it imposes for slow and thoughtful reading, "so that in the act of writing, many thoughts are suggested that would have been lost by a more rapid method." When the labour became at any time irksome, he called to mind that Cicero copied books with his own hand, in order, as he says, not to be idle on holidays or days devoted to spectacles.

Letter-writing was also a feature of the age, and took the place of our literary papers and reviews. So eager were the people for news, that Petrarch complained of men in Cisalpine Gaul, who stopped the couriers, opened their packets, read the letters, and copied whatever took their fancy ; and to save themselves the trouble of copying, they sometimes even kept the packets.

It was a common practice also to commit interesting passages to memory, so that they could readily be reproduced when friends met together. Instead of sending to the library for a volume as we are accustomed to do, some one was invited to draw upon the treasures of his memory for the entertainment and instruction of the company, or for the support of an argument. Thus the history at the

end of Boccaccio's *Decamerone* made so lively an impression on Petrarch, that he committed it to memory, in order to retail it while chatting with his friends.

We get some idea of the mode in which a book was published in the proposal of Coluccio after Petrarch's death, to revise his Latin poem *Africa*, put a summary at the head of each book, as Ovid had done for the *Æneid*, and then to get a number of copies made, and send one to Bologna, one to Paris, one to England, and one to Florence, to be deposited in each case in a house to which the public had access.

The itinerant singers to some small extent supplied the place of books, and when they visited a house a second time it was expected of them that they should produce something new. Petrarch in one of his letters, dated 1364, says:—"These people have not much intelligence, but good memory, and plenty of effrontery and impudence. Having nothing of their own, they plunder other people, and visit the courts of princes to declaim with much emphasis, verses in the vulgar tongue which they have learnt by heart. They thus conciliate the good graces of noblemen, and get from them not only money, but clothes and presents of all kinds. They replenish their stock-in-trade at the houses of the best authors, from whom they obtain verses by means of prayers, and sometimes of money should the author be needy or avaricious. I have often been importuned by them; although they come but rarely now, perhaps on account of my age or my change of literary pursuit, or my frequent refusals—for having been often much pestered by them, I treated them with rigour, and they found me inflexible. Sometimes, however, touched by their misery or their humility, I have yielded and employed a few hours in

composing something to enable them to live. Having obtained what they wanted, I have seen them depart naked and miserable, and return some time after clad in silk, with a well-filled purse, to thank me for having drawn them out of misery. This so affected me that, considering what I did for them was in the way of alms, I was in the habit for some time of yielding to their request, but they annoyed me so often that I had to change my mode of dealing with them."

With respect to the text of the *Divine Comedy*, we are of course indebted to the various manuscripts or Codices,* scattered over Europe, and which are valuable in proportion as their date comes nearer to the time of the poet. There is no Codex in existence of earlier date than that of the death of the

* The reader need scarcely be informed that the word Codex originated in the ancient mode of writing on tablets of wood, or wood covered with wax, by means of a *style* of metal, bone, or ivory, pointed at one end, and rounded smooth at the other for the purpose of erasing. The word *style* is now used metaphorically to express the choice and arrangement of words by which an author conveys his meaning. These tablets, or thin slices of wood, when fastened together, formed a book or *Codex*, so called from its resemblance to the trunk of a tree (*Caudex*) cut into tablets. Hence our word *Code*, also *Table-book*, noticed by Chaucer in the Sumpner's tale. The word *codex* and *codice* is still applied to ancient manuscripts. Leaves of trees were also used for writing on, whence we get the word *folio* (*folium*, a leaf), and also such an expression as "the leaves of a book." The inner bark (or *liber*) especially of the lime tree, was much used as a writing material, and hence the Latin name for a book. For convenience of carriage, the bark books were rolled up, and were hence named *volumen*, from which we get the word *volume*. Our Saxon ancestors used the bark of the birch tree, *boc*, hence our word *book*. Other writing materials were also used, such as linen, leather, skins of animals, parchment, vellum, and papyrus, from which the word paper is derived, and this seems to have been invented or introduced into Europe at the latter end of the eleventh century.

poet. There are altogether about five hundred Codices in the libraries of Europe, or, according to Professor Witte, the exact number is 498. Of this number the libraries of Italy contain 390, and they are distributed in the following manner. Florence and the Tuscan cities have about 200, North Italy 100, Rome and the adjoining States 80, Naples and Sicily probably not more than 10.

After Italy our own country is most rich in Codices. In Lord Ashburnham's collection there are 18, which were purchased from M. Libri's first sale. The Bodleian Library at Oxford has 14, the British Museum 12, Lord Vernon, of Sudbury Hill 4, together with twenty-one volumes in folio of the commentaries of Benvenuto da Imola; the Earl of Leicester at Holkham has 6, and Sir Thomas Phillips at Middle Hill 4. Other private libraries in England and Scotland contain examples, and there is one Codex at the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow.

France claims about 40 Codices, but most of them are in the National Library at Paris. Spain and Portugal have about 10 Codices, Vienna in 1850 had only 2, one of which had belonged to Prince Eugene of Saxony. Berlin owns only 1 Codex, Dresden 1, Frankfort 1, Breslau 3, Goerlitz in Prussia 1, Stuttgart 1, Poland 1, Denmark 3, Belgium 2, and probably there are a few others in Northern Europe.

The earliest known Codex is that of the Marquis Landi, of Piacenza. It is dated 1336, or only fifteen years after Dante's death. It is to be regretted that this copy has in many places been altered from the original. The greater number of the Codices date from the middle of the fourteenth to the middle of the fifteenth century, when Gutenberg's great invention came into use. There are very few Codices of earlier date than the middle of the fourteenth cen-

tury. There is a Codex at Pisaro with the date 1328: this would be the oldest if it were genuine, which it is not. One at Ashburnham of 1335 is also unsatisfactory; and the Santa Croce Codex of 1343 is doubtful.

According to Professor Witte, there are scarcely five Codices of earlier date than 1350. And there are not more than twenty-seven to twenty-nine Codices with the date inserted, between 1350 and 1400. There are thirty-six Codices with dates belonging to the first half of the fifteenth century; and twenty-six with dates from 1450 to 1470; and seven between the last-named date and 1495. Of commentaries without the text, with dates from 1355 to 1488, there are thirty-two.

Of the 498 Codices many are incomplete: three do not contain the *Inferno*, six have only the second Cantica, and twenty-two only the third; and eighteen of those that have the first Cantica want the third canto of it.

The general form of the Codices is that of a moderately sized folio; but some are large folios, and others slender octavos. The larger folios are mostly on vellum, with numerous illustrations, and usually with an accompanying commentary in smaller characters, surrounding the text, which thus appears as set in a framework of very neat writing. Most of the early Codices are on parchment, and a few on a soft yellowish paper. The smallest Codex is in the Imperial Library of Vienna: it is about one inch and a quarter square.

The styles of writing made use of in the Codices have been reduced to five, namely:—1. *Gottico Italiano*, or Gothic Italian; 2. *Mezzo-Gottico*, or middle Gothic; 3. *Mezzo-Gottico-tondo*, or rounded middle Gothic; 4. *Mezzo-tondo*, or middle rounded; and 5. *Tondo*, or

rounded. The Italian Gothic is less angular than the German and English characters.

The more costly Codices were written by professional calligraphers, and were ornamented by the best miniaturists of the age, such as the *Codex Urbinato* of the Vatican, which is perhaps the most splendid of all.

The most correct text is to be found in those Codices which were written out by students of the *Divine Comedy* for their own use. Ser Landi's folio of the date 1419 has been already referred to. In such copies as these there are no miniatures, but arabesques are often inserted at the beginning of each part or Cantica, or there is an ornamental border to the first page. The first verse of each Cantica has usually an ornamented initial letter, and in many cases there is one to each canto, with commonly a rubric or title in red, and not unfrequently the first letters of each *terzina* is marked with red or blue.

Some Codices have at the end an explanatory poem in three cantos, attributed to Boccaccio, as in the Codex of *Santa Croce*; and in other Codices there is a still longer explanatory poem in eleven cantos. Occasionally the *Credo* of Dante is added, and also his epitaph. The Codices usually conclude with the date of the year in which they were written, and the name of the writer, together with an expression of thanks to the Deity or to the Virgin Mary for the work having been thus happily finished.

Codices differ almost as much in their orthography as in the character of the writing. Vowels are often omitted where in reading or scanning they would not be heard or counted. Where two consonants come together the first is usually indicated by a hyphen placed over, as *mōdo* for *mondo*. In some Codices, through the haste or negligence

of transcribers, this mark over the *o* in *modo* has been omitted. This has caused confusion in the reading of certain important passages. For example, in the *Codice di Santa Croce*, at Florence, a mistake of this kind occurs in *Inferno*, iii., 49 :—

Fama di loro il modo esser non lasser,

where *modo* should be *mōdo*.

No fame of them the world doth e'er allow.

In *Inferno*, iv., 75, *modo* is usually given, while the context shows that *mondo* is meant, as the poet is referring to a particular place where the poets and philosophers of antiquity are separated from the *mal mondo* of the common herd. But the most celebrated example occurs in *Inferno* V., 102, where Francesca refers to her own beautiful person :

Che me fu tolta, e il modo m'offende.

Ta'en from me by a mode which still offends.

The speaker in this, the usual reading, is supposed to refer to her violent death ; but in the Ravenna edition of 1848, the Editor, the Abate Mauro Ferranti, on the authority of two Codici in the Biblioteca Classense, substituted *mondo* for *modo*, which entirely alters the sense of the passage, and in the opinion of many establishes the innocence of Francesca :—

Ta'en from me, and the world still me offends.

As if she would say, "Maligns me unjustly, and this is my protest against it."

Since the date of this new reading a large number of Codici have been found with the mark over the *o* in *modo*. Nevertheless, Professor Witte, in his revised text (Berlino, 1862), retains the old reading in this as well as in one of the former passages referred to (*Inferno*, iv., 75).

In the earlier Codices there are no stops; and where punctuation does occur, the writing is of later date.

Dante's name is written in various ways in different Codices. The original name was Aldighieri, but subsequently the *d* was softened into an *l*.

In all cases where Dante's death is recorded, it is said to have taken place at Ravenna on the day of *Santa Croce*, the 14th of September, 1321. In one of the Vatican Codices his age is mentioned as being fifty-six years and four months.

The *Codice Vaticano par excellence*, numbered 3,199, is supposed to have been the one written by Boccaccio with annotations by Petrarch. It is a folio of eighty leaves, written in elegant Italian Gothic characters, somewhat rounded, and in double columns. Each canto has an illuminated initial, and at the beginning of each part or *Cantica* is a large one with a border. There is also a Codex at the Vatican, which is said to have been made at the request of certain ecclesiastics assembled at the Council of Constance in 1414. The Commentary is by Serravalle, Bishop of Fermo, who is represented conducting Dante to Oxford to perfect him in his theological studies, probably from the tradition known to the English bishops attending the Council that Dante had visited Oxford.

The Codex, No. 839 of the Lansdowne collection in the British Museum is an elegant narrow folio, written in *mezzo-tondo*, on beautiful vellum of 629 leaves; the readings are good, and the illuminations, including portraits of Virgil and Dante, and borders of flowers and foliage, are also good. This volume is of the fifteenth century, and was bought at Dr. Askew's sale for seven guineas. On a blank leaf at the beginning is written in pencil, "If my Lord does not

approve of this purchase, Matthews will take it on his own account." "He might have been right glad to do so," remarks Dr. Barlow, "and it would have been well for Dantophilists, perhaps, if Codici had not since increased in value a thousand per cent."

CHAPTER III.

THE PRINTER.

LET us now pass from the scribe to the printer. Although the art of printing from movable types dates from 1450, its inventors kept the knowledge of it to themselves for some years ; and would have done so longer but for an accident which at first seemed disastrous to the young art, but proved in fact to be the means of spreading it over Europe. Mayenz, where Fust and Schœffer were profitably employed in the new mode of multiplying books, they having first got rid of Gutenberg, was besieged on the 14th October, 1462, by Adolph von Nassau, who had been appointed by the Pope Archbishop of Mayenz in place of the deposed Archbishop Diether von Eisenberg. The city fell after a short resistance, and was sacked and partly burnt. Fust's house was destroyed by fire ; the printers were dispersed, and, travelling to different cities, set up printing presses on their own account. Within three years after this event there was a printing press at work in Rome, but it could not be expected that Dante, who had placed several Popes, many Cardinals, and innumerable Priests, according to their merits, in the various circles of the *Inferno*, would have his poem printed in the Sacred City. Indeed, no edition of the *Divine Comedy* had been printed in Rome until the middle

of the eighteenth century. It was first printed at Foligno in 1472, and again in the same year at Jesi and Mantua; at Naples in 1475; at Venice in 1477, for the first time with a commentary; at Milan in 1478; and at Florence in 1481, under the editorship of Cristoforo Landino.

It has already been noticed that the word *Divine* was first used in the Venice edition of 1516. Title pages were not introduced into books until upwards of half-a-century after the invention of printing. A previous edition to the one just referred to begins thus on the first page:—*Comincia la prima parte chiamato Inferno della Commedia del Venerabile Poeta Dante Alighieri, nobile cittadino Fiorentino.*

Florence published in 1595 a fine edition of the *Divine Comedy*, under the auspices of the *Accademia della Crusca*, the first that was free from manuscript errors. The numerous libraries at Florence at that time contained upwards of a hundred codices, and these were collated with the edition in question. The best readings were adopted, and the probable ones placed in the margin. This edition has always been regarded with something like the veneration which we attach to the Shakspeare of 1623.

About 1620, Francesco Cionacci, a noble Florentine, published a catalogue of 452 editions extant in his time. Since that date the editions amount to several times that number.

About the beginning of the sixteenth century Dante fell into neglect for several reasons, one of which was the taste for classical literature which prevailed under Leo. X., and caused the critics of that time to regard Dante as an irregular and barbarous poet, while Boccaccio and Petrarch were held up as models of Italian composition; and the chivalry of

Boiardo and of Ariosto was found more amusing than the solemn themes of Dante. The Reformation was another cause why the poet should be execrated, who had dared to place some of the Popes in hell, and to put into the mouth of St. Peter a strong invective against the temporal power of the Church, and to maintain the superiority of the Emperors over the Popes. The measure of his iniquity was quite filled up when the Protestants claimed him as one of the witnesses of the truth.

About the middle of the sixteenth century the Jesuits had the sole direction of education in Italy; they suppressed the Dante lectures, and used all their efforts to put down a writer so little in unison with their opinions. But even at that time we hear of three men of genius who expressed their admiration of Dante. One was Speroni, who was regarded as the model writer of Italian prose; the second was Michael Angelo, who filled a copy of Dante with drawings, an invaluable treasure which was lost in a voyage between Leghorn and Civita Vecchia, the saddest loss probably that art has ever sustained; the third was Tasso, who on being asked to name the greatest poet of Italy, replied "Dante."

From 1600 to 1730 Dante had no commentators, and but few editors. The taste of the age was debased, and conceits and pastorals were the tests of genius. The literary men of the time founded the Academy of the Arcades, and assuming the names of shepherds, they dreamed of rural felicity. The Jesuits continued to be hostile. Venturi made an abridgment of the most necessary parts of the *Divine Comedy*, accompanied by critical remarks, in which, in accordance with the maxims of his order, he strove to exaggerate the faults, and to expose the impiety of the poet.

Bettinelli in his Virgilian Letters, ridicules Dante as the most barbarous of poets. Tiraboschi, also a Jesuit, dwells in his History of Italian literature at length, and with minuteness upon Petrarch, and gives only a few dates and critical remarks upon Dante. He bestows twenty pages upon the Jesuit Possevino, and only four on Machiavel.

After the fall of the Jesuits, Lombardi, a Franciscan, ventured upon his well-known Commentary, the best historical one that had yet appeared. He was of the same order as Ganganelli, the Pope who suppressed the Jesuits, without, however, being able to suppress the literary and religious prejudices which they had left behind them. But Pius VI. was not favourable to an Anti-Papal poet, and Lombardi had to be cautious how he brought out his Commentary. He puts his initials only on the title-page, together with a portrait of Dante, and an inscription, in which the hint was conveyed that he (the author) was in danger from the power which tramples on kings and emperors. His friend Angelucchi, who edited his work, was imprisoned in 1794 on account of his political opinions.

But as our own Shakspeare and Milton were, during a certain period of our literary history, neglected and misinterpreted because they were misunderstood, but at the present time are much more prized than they ever were, so there came a period of revival, in which Dante shone forth in greater lustre than ever. Early in the eighteenth century, Gravina, in a small work on the poetical theory, dwells on Dante with originality and depth. He expresses a strong admiration for the grandeur and the dignity of the subject he has chosen, for the sublimity of the invention, and the originality of the execution. Vico, a Neapolitan philosopher, contemplating the various periods of history, came to the

conclusion that the Middle Ages were a period of barbarism similar to that which enveloped Greece, and that Dante was the Homer of this new barbarism, and from a copious induction of facts and examples, his conclusion respecting the genius of Dante was very similar to that of Gravina. Other admirers of Dante, among whom must be named Varano, found in the *Divine Comedy* their ideal of the highest perfection of the poetical art. Alfieri and Monti avowed themselves to be fervent admirers of Dante; and thus the fame of our poet achieved a new birth; he was proclaimed "the Doctor of Divine Truth, and the most learned, whose searching glance has comprehended all human things." The first line of his epitaph by Giovanni del Virgilio, *Theologus Dantes, nullius dogmatis expers*, has passed into a proverb. But at no period has the *Divine Comedy* been studied with so much assiduity and so generally as during the present century. Commentaries, dissertations, philological researches, translations, and every kind of literary labour have accumulated around this great poem. In our own language upwards of thirty translations have been made—an honour which can be claimed for no other modern poem. The late King of Saxony, under the assumed title of Philalethes, published a translation of the poem into his own language with a learned commentary. He also founded a Dante Society, of which he was the first President, and the transactions of this learned body contain much valuable matter. The successor of the Royal President was Professor Witte, of Halle, whose revised text is known to every student of Dante, and who bestowed an amount of labour on his task which may be estimated from the single fact that in order to obtain data for the selection of the most trustworthy Codici he collated 407 of them with the third

canto of the *Inferno*. Old annotations and speculations buried in the dust of libraries have been cleared out and republished. Researches on the life of Dante have formed a favourite pursuit ; the places mentioned in his poem have been revisited and redescribed with the same fond zeal that we show for Stratford-on-Avon ; the archives of the Italian cities have been ransacked ; the smallest document bearing the name of the great Florentine poet has been regarded as a treasure ; while in this country we have a Dante Society established in Oxford University ; and the late Dr. Barlow has founded a lectureship at University College, London, for the appointment of a qualified scholar, who in three consecutive years is to deliver twelve lectures a year on one of the three great divisions of the *Divine Comedy*. Dr. Barlow also left his library and varied collection of objects connected with Dante to the same institution.

CHAPTER IV.

THE POET.

ACCORDING to the astrological creed of Dante's time, the Earth was the fixed centre of the universe. When Satan was cast out of Heaven he was precipitated upon this earth, which shrank in horror from his contact, and formed a vast conical cavity, with its point at the earth's centre, and this cavity forms Hell, the abode of impenitent sinners. The earth, thus displaced, threw up an enormous mountain in the southern hemisphere, in view of the constellation known as the Southern Cross. This is the Mountain of *Purgatory*, up which repentant sinners pass on their way to Paradise. On the top of this mountain is the Earthly Paradise, with its Tree of Knowledge, the whole having been transferred to this place after the Fall.

This fixed earth is surrounded by the sphere of air, and this by the region of fire, whence come lightning, shooting stars, the Aurora, and other luminous meteors. Revolving round this earth are the Moon, the Sun, and other planets, the Sun being regarded as a planet, and all of them self-luminous, while their motions are regulated and controlled by angels, archangels, thrones, principalities, and powers.

The earth being the central object of God's care, all the other planets, nay, heaven itself, are peopled from this

earth. Thus, after death, those who failed in their religious vows inhabit the Moon. In this heaven of the Moon they are happy indeed, but not so exalted in bliss as in the other heavens. The heaven of Mercury is inhabited by patriot kings and active spirits; that of Venus by lovers; of the Sun by learned schoolmen; of Mars by Christian warriors; of Jupiter by righteous rulers; and of Saturn by contemplative saints.

Above and beyond these planets is the heaven of the fixed stars, inhabited by the Hosts of the Triumph of Christ. Above this is the *Primum Mobile*, the sphere of the Divine Glory; and lastly, including all, but itself not included, comes the *Empyream*, the sphere of God's visible presence.

Such is the wonderful machinery of this magnificent poem, and it is set in motion by the personal experience of Dante himself.

Dante writes throughout in the first person, and begins by stating that having attained the middle age of thirty-five, he found himself in a dark entangled forest, symbolical of life, full of sin and error, in which the beaten path was lost.

Ah me ! how hard it were to make it clear
 What was this strong rough forest, tangled o'er,
 Which only in the thought renews the fear,
 So bitter 'tis, e'en Death is little more.

So bitter is it to recall the sins of one's youth. But while struggling on he saw in the distance the delectable mountain, the summit of which was illumined by Christ, the Sun of Righteousness; and pressing eagerly forward in order to climb it, he was arrested by a panther, symbolical of sensual pleasure, which drove him out of his path. Proceeding in another direction, he was arrested by a furious lion, symbolical of pride or ambition, and also by a hungry

she-wolf, the symbol of avarice. These three beasts wrought such terror in him that he fled, and was thus still further removed from the delectable mountain. He suddenly becomes aware of the presence of one

Who hoarse appeared through silence long sustained ;
thus referring in the usual figurative language to the general neglect of the study of Virgil, for it was the shade of the bard of Mantua that now stood before him. When Dante becomes aware of his personality, he exclaims :—

In thee my Master, Author too I see,
For thou art he from whom alone I won
The beauteous style that made me honoured be.

He implores protection against the beasts, especially the she-wolf, which is further symbolical of the Court of Rome, and of the Temporal Power. Virgil explains to him that it is necessary for his spiritual welfare that he traverse Hell in order to see how sinful sin is, and how awful its punishments, after which he must see Purgatory, in order to know something of repentance, before he can witness the joys of Heaven. Virgil promises to be his guide through Hell and Purgatory, but for the higher vision

A soul shall come, worthier for that than I :
I'll place thee 'neath her guidance, quitting mine.

This is the first allusion to Beatrice, and although she does not actually appear until towards the end of the second *Cantica*, yet we never lose sight of her, and it is upon the proper understanding of her character and function that the real meaning of the poem becomes apparent.

In order to see how the idea of Beatrice—that is, “the blessing one,” or “one who blesses”—became developed in Dante's mind, and forms the central figure of the *Divine Comedy*, it is necessary to enter into some detail.

Dante was born at Florence on the 8th of May, 1265. He was of noble family, being a great-grandson of Cacciaguida Elisei, who married a lady of the family of Alighieri, of Florence, and her children assumed her arms and her name. Cacciaguida accompanied the Emperor Conrad II. in his crusade, and was knighted and died in battle in Syria in 1147. We meet with him in the *Paradiso*, where he gives an account of himself and of the state of Florence, and its primitive manners before the breaking out of the feud between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines.

Dante's father died while the poet was still in his boyhood. His mother, Donna Bella, gave him a good education, and selected for his master Brunetto Latini, a famous philosopher and poet. Dante bears eloquent testimony to the value of his tutor's services in the fifteenth canto of the *Inferno*. Under his guidance, he became master of several languages, and learned to find his chief delight in Virgil, *il suo maestro e il suo Autore*, and he confesses that he acquired the beauties of his style *con lungo studio e grande amore*. He mastered the Aristotelian philosophy as it was then taught in the schools, and acquired a name among *color che sanno* (those who know something). He studied the scholastic philosophy then in vogue, by which he escaped from the vulgar crowd—he loved thee (Beatrice) so

*Che t'amo tanto,
Che uscio per te della volgare schiera.*

He was skilled in jurisprudence, was master of astrology and geography, had a knowledge of medicine and geometry, of mythology and history; of all of which he gives abundant proofs in his great poem, which may be regarded as a cyclopædia of the knowledge of his time. He was also practically acquainted with the fine arts. Casella

taught him music and Giotto drawing. The one set to music some of his canzoni, and the other gave us his portrait; but his most intimate friend was Guido Cavalcanti, a good poet, and a better philosopher.

It will be remembered that Dante meets the shade of Casella at the entrance of *Purgatorio*, and asks him to sing one of his old songs:—

I said :—‘ If no new law take from thee here
 The memory or use of the song of love,
 Which wont to solace all my yearning care,
 Thee may it please of comfort to approve
 Unto my soul, which with its body eke
 In coming here with much of suffering strove,’
Love that within my mind doth parlance seek—
 He then began in such melodious strain,
 Its sweetness still doth oft within me wake.
 My Master, I and all that there remain
 Of folk, with him appeared so well content,
 As if nought else could touch the mind again,
 All motionless we our attention lent
 His notes.

If Boccaccio's biography is to be credited, it appears that when Dante was a boy of nine years of age his father took him on a May-day to a festival at the house of a rich neighbour, Portinari by name, who had a young daughter called *Beatrice*, or in the Florentine abbreviation *Bice*. She was eight years and four months old. But now we must let Dante speak for himself in the language of that remarkable allegory which he wrote in his twenty-fifth, or, as some say, in his twenty-seventh or twenty-ninth year, namely, *La Vita Nuova*, which has often been translated as the “Early Life” of the poet, but which for reasons that will afterwards be given, I prefer to render literally “The New Life.”

“In that part of the tablet of my memory (previous to

which there is little legible) is a Rubric, which says, *Incipit vita nova*, 'My new life begins.' Under which Rubric I find written the following words, which it is my intention to collect in this little book.

"Nine times from the hour of my birth had the heaven of light returned, as it were, to the same point in its orbit, when the glorious lady of my thoughts appeared for the first time before my eyes. By many she was called *Beatrice*, who knew her by no other name." After noting that she was about the beginning of her ninth year while he was at the end of his, he continues :—"She appeared to me in a dress of a noble colour, a subdued and becoming blood red, with a sash and ornaments suited to her very youthful years. At that moment (I speak the truth) the spirit of life which dwells in the most secret chamber of the heart began to tremble so violently as to be fearfully visible in the smallest pulses of my body, and with faltering voice said these words, *Ecce Deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur mihi*, 'Behold a god stronger than I, who, coming, will subdue me.' Then the animal spirit that dwells in the lofty chamber, whither the spirits of the senses carry their perceptions, began to marvel greatly, and addressing itself especially to the spirits of vision, said, *Apparuit jam beatitudo vestra*. 'Now has thy blessedness appeared.' At that moment the spirit of Nature, which dwells in that part to which we administer food, began to weep, and amidst tears, said, 'Ah, wretched me ! from henceforth I shall often be impeded !' From that time forth, I say that Love held absolute empire over my soul (which had been so quickly betrothed to him), and began to exercise over me, in consequence of the strength which my imagination gave him, such vast and uncontrolled power that I was compelled wholly to comply with his wishes. He

oftentimes commanded me to strive to get a sight of this youthful angel; consequently I frequently sought her during my boyhood, and found in her so noble, so praiseworthy a bearing, that the line of Homer might with truth be applied to her—"She seems not to be a daughter of mortal man, but of the gods," and although her image, which was always present to me, might be the effect of love's bold signiory over me, yet it possessed a power so noble that on no occasion (in these matters which required the faithful counsel of reason) would it suffer love to move me, without listening to its dictates. . . . When exactly so many days had elapsed after the above-described apparition of this most noble lady as were necessary to complete nine whole years, it chanced that on the last of those days this most admirable person appeared to me in a dress of the purest white, between two noble ladies older than herself, and passing along the street, she turned her eyes towards the spot where, trembling with fear, I stood, and with an ineffable courtesy (which now has its reward in eternity) saluted me in so striking a manner that I seemed to reach the very extreme of happiness. The hour at which I received this most bewitching salutation was precisely the none* of that day, and as this was the first time that her words had reached my ears, the pleasure that I had received was such, that I quitted the company as it were in a state of intoxication." He then relates a remarkable dream in which love appears holding the dreamer's inflamed heart in his hand, which he gives to the lady of his happiness. Having discovered within himself the power of composing in rhyme, he made his dream the subject of a questioning sonnet, which he sent to many who were celebrated as poets

* The fifth of the seven canonical hours.

in those days. In due time many sonnets were returned by way of answer; one was from Guido Cavalcanti, another from Cino da Pistoia, but Dante significantly remarks :— “The real meaning of my dream, which is now manifest to the most simple understanding, was not then seen by any one.” He goes on to state that his whole soul being absorbed in the contemplation of that lovely person, his health became frail and tottering, as was noticed by many persons who 'inquired after the cause. But what most deeply afflicted him was that for some imagined affront “my most noble lady, the Enemy of all vice, and the Queen of all virtue, denied me her most graceful salutation as she passed me, in which alone all my happiness consisted. Now I would endeavour to make intelligible the power with which her salutation operated upon me. I say, then, that wherever she appeared the hope of receiving her adorable salutation effaced all enmity within me; nay, a flame of charity pervaded me, which caused me to pardon everyone who had given me offence. . . . Hence it is manifest that all my happiness dwelt in her salutation, which very often surpassed and overwhelmed my power of utterance.”

The effect of this salutation is further described in some of the sweetest sonnets that have ever been composed. I will attempt to convey some idea of one of them in the following translation.

Negli occhi porta la mia Donna, amore.

My lady carries love within her eyes,
And thus makes gentle whom she gazes on;
Where'er she goes, all men towards her turn;
Whom she salutes, trembles his heart somehow;
And conscious of his own defects, he sighs,
With downcast look and countenance all wan:
Before her, anger, pride, are quickly gone;
O aid me, Ladies, to set forth her praise.

Who hears her speak, feels something come to bless,
 For in his heart sweet, lowly thoughts are bred :
 He's blest who first beholds her for awhile ;
 But how she looks if she but gently smile,
 Cannot be kept in mind, still less be said,
 New miracle is she of gentleness.

Omitting for the present a number of details which the curious reader may consult for himself, let us pass on to the concluding passage, which has this remarkable statement, accompanied by another sonnet :—"Soon after writing this sonnet a wonderful vision appeared to me, in which I saw things that made me determine to write no more of this beautiful lady until I could treat of her in a manner more suited to her dignity ; in order to arrive at which I study with all my might, as she well knows. So that if it be the will of Him in whom all things have their being that my life should continue for a few years longer, I hope to speak of her as no woman was ever spoken of before. And may it please Him who is the God of Mercy that my soul may ascend to behold the glory of its Lady, the blessed Beatrice, who, in a beatified state, seeth Him face to face, *qui est per omnia sæcula benedictus*, who is blessed for evermore."

Now, there are many things to be observed with respect to the *Vita Nuova*. If it be a true narrative, as many suppose, why did not Dante strive to make Falco Portinari's pretty daughter his own wife, instead of allowing her to become the wife of another ? In the *Vita Nuova*, there is not the slightest allusion to courting, or to the ordinary conversation of lovers ; but when questioned by some ladies as to his intentions respecting Beatrice, he declared that his only object was to be recognised and publicly saluted by her. Certainly no young lady would be satisfied with such a lover, and that Beatrice was not so satisfied may be

inferred from her conduct in marrying another, while at the same time Dante himself was probably engaged to another. Beatrice is said to have died on the 9th June, 1290, a few years after her marriage; and in the year following Dante married a lady of the Donati family, Gemma di Manetto, the mother of his six children. We know that he held a high position in Florence, that he was employed on important embassies, was listened to in Council with admiration, and was consulted with deference on State affairs. Will it be believed that at such a period he could have written a love-sick book, as it must be named if we take it literally, full of the most exaggerated and even grotesque praises of a pretty girl? I say again, if taken literally.

But suppose we regard the *Vita Nuova* as an allegory, as an intellectual treatise on Love—not the love of Woman, but of Wisdom, of Divine Wisdom, as depicted in some of the finest poetry that was ever written :—

“Where shall Wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?

“Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living.

“The depth saith, ‘It is not in me;’ and the sea saith, ‘It is not with me.’

“It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire.

“The gold and the crystal cannot equal it; and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold.

“No mention shall be made of coral or of pearls; for the price of Wisdom is above rubies.”—*Job* xxviii. 12-18.

"I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me."—*Proverbs* viii., 17.

"The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old."—*Ibid.* 22.

"Then I was by him as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him."—*Ibid.* 30.

"I loved Wisdom, and sought her out from my youth : I desired to make her my spouse, and I was a lover of her beauty."—*Wisdom* viii., 2.

If we adopt the theory that Beatrice is Divine Wisdom personified, the *Vita Nuova* becomes a beautiful allegory, and the following passage will appear perfectly appropriate :—

"That most lovely Lady rose so high in the estimation of others, that as she walked along the streets, people ran to get a sight of her ; which circumstance occasioned me wonderful delight ; and such modesty came over the heart of him who chanced to be near her, that he did neither dare to raise his eyes nor to return her salutation. If any be incredulous, there are many who by their own experience are able to testify to the truth of this matter. She moved along, crowned and adorned with humility, exhibiting no pride on account of those things which she both saw and heard. Many, indeed, when she had passed, would say, 'This is not a woman, but one of the beautiful angels of heaven !' Others said, 'She is a miracle ! blessed be the Lord who is able to perform so admirable a work !' I say, then, she was of so noble a presence, so abounding in every charm, that those who looked upon her felt within them so chaste, so gentle a sense of pleasure, that they were incapable of describing it, nor was there any one that had the opportunity of seeing her, who did not instantly feel com-

pelled to sigh. These and other extraordinary effects were produced by her, actually and miraculously ; wherefore, reflecting on all this, and desiring to resume my former style of writing in her praise, I proposed saying some words whereby I might be able to make known her excellent and admirable powers ; so that not only those that had occasion actually to see her, but that others also might know as much of her as might be conveyed by words. Then I made this sonnet :—

*Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare.**

When she, my Lady, greets folks with " Good-day,"

Such candour and such gentleness combine,

That tongues grow tremulous and speech resign,

And to look on her no one dare essay.

She feels men's praises as she goes her way,

In meekness clad, an influence benign ;

You fancy she must be a thing divine,

Come down from heaven a marvel to display.

Her presence is so pleasant to the eye,

That through the eye the heart with sweetness glows ;

To understand it you its power must prove ;

And from those lips an influence seems to move,

So sweet and full of love, it overflows,

And goes on saying to our spirits, " Sigh !"

" I have said that my Lady grew so much in favour that not only was she honoured and praised, but through her, many others rose to honour and praise. Seeing this, and wishing to make it manifest to others who had not seen it, I wrote this sonnet, in which is expressed the power her virtue had on others of her own sex :—

* Salvini regarded this Sonnet as " the best out of the million of Sonnets that threatened to swamp the Italian Parnassus." Scartazzini, in quoting the passage, adds :—" At the present day all connoisseurs are agreed, that if Dante had written nothing but the lyric poems, he would be in the first rank of Italian Poets."

Vide perfettamente ogni salute.

“ He sees each form of goodness perfectly,
Who among other ladies looks on mine;
And her companions should, most duteously,
For such sweet grace in thanks to God incline.
Such virtue in her beauty all must see,
That envy causes no one to repine;
But in her lustre clad, she seems to be
Of love, and faith, and gentleness, the shrine.
Her presence makes all else more meanly show,
Her presence more than pleasure doth confer,
For each through her in honour may improve.
From every act of hers such graces flow,
That no one in his mind can image her,
But he must sigh in all the sweets of love.”

CHAPTER V.

BEATRICE.

ITALIAN commentators on the *Vita Nuova* are numerous, but by no means in agreement as to the intention of the author with respect to the character of Beatrice in the narrative. They agree that the *Vita Nuova* is a necessary preparation for the study of the *Divine Comedy*. They do not agree in the rendering of what Dante calls the rubric, *Incipit Vita Nova*, some translating it, "Here begins the *new* or *regenerate*," others the "*youthful* or *early* life of the poet." They do not agree as to the nature of the narrative, whether it is a real history of persons and events, or whether it is a fiction or allegory, and as such the parent or suggester of the romances which afterwards appeared in various parts of Europe. The elder Rossetti adopted the opinion of some of his predecessors, that Beatrice is an imaginary character, that the *Vita Nuova* is a treatise on Love, purely intellectual, in the form of an allegory; that Wisdom in its most extended sense, personified under the name of Beatrice, was the object of Dante's love; that by Love he meant Study, in the same way as he confesses he used it in the *Convito*, where he imagines Philosophy "in fashion like a gentle Lady, nor could I fancy her otherwise than piteous, whereupon so truly did I gaze upon her with ordinary eyes, that

scarcely could I turn myself away. . . . In short time I began so much to feel her sweetness that her love chased away and destroyed all other thoughts in me." In the *Vita* he also remarks that his love withdrew his thoughts from all meaner things, an idea which is repeated in the second canto of the *Inferno*:—

O Beatrice, why
Dost thou not succour him, who loved thee so
That he, for thee, the vulgar herd did fly?

The theory that I am now advocating explains that the sudden excitement of the vital, animal, and natural spirits by the first appearance of Beatrice, represents the effect produced by the difficulties attendant on the prosecution of a work of labour, especially on the young; that the salutation of Beatrice shows the capacity for acquiring the sciences, and the readiness to answer the call of those who, having a good understanding, are seriously inclined to study; that the divers Ladies by whom Beatrice was accompanied represent the sciences, who were her handmaids; that the death of the father of Beatrice refers to the death of Dante's master, Brunetto Latini, who first introduced him to Wisdom.

On the other hand, it is contended by Fraticelli and others that Boccaccio, Dante's earliest biographer, regarded the *Vita Nuova* as a true story, as also did Dante's contemporary, the author of *l'Ottimo*, and they take Dante's expressions, both in the *Vita* and in the *Convito* as literally true, as when, for example, he says in the latter work, "When the first delight of my soul [Beatrice] was taken from me, I remained in such a state of grief as to be frequently inconsolable." And he goes on to state that having read Boëthius *De Consolatione* and Cicero *De Amicitia*, "my intellect saw

many things as it were in a dream, such as may be seen in the *Vita Nuova*." This seems rather to favour the allegorical view of the subject. But he goes on to state that, continuing his studies during thirty months, he began to feel the pleasures of learning, which he calls *Donna*, and he adds, "This *Donna* was the daughter of God, Queen of all most noble, most beautiful Philosophy." But some commentators separate the Beatrice of the *Vita* from that of the *Convito* by making one real and the other allegorical; and they say that she of the *Vita* is real, because not only is her name given, but her exact age, the death of her father, and also of herself, and some other circumstances of a realistic nature. He says in the *Convito*, "I am certain of going to a better life after this, where my most glorious Lady dwells; she of whom my soul was enamoured while she lived here." Reference is also made to the thirtieth and thirty-first cantos of the *Purgatorio*, where he speaks of her as made of flesh and blood. There are many passages in these two cantos which do not justify this view.

But the distinction between body and spirit, substance and shade, is a difficulty that runs all through the *Divine Comedy*, a difficulty which would not be felt in Dante's time. The increasing troubles of the age led men to suppose that the end of the world was at hand. The Church, which was interested in this belief, encouraged it for the sake of those gifts which were to bring salvation to the givers. Thus, in the midst of the revolutions and agitations of the present life, men were led to regard the future with horror, and it is this future life that the poet undertook to describe. Dante sang to eager listeners; for in his day men no more doubted of the existence of Hell

than they did of their own. There were stories afloat of men who had been permitted to visit the dread abode, and to return to relate its horrors. Dante made himself one of these, and he knew that all his details and descriptions would not only be accepted but serve to fill up the outline which was already in every one's mind. It was no absurdity that disembodied spirits should be capable of enduring bodily torments, for this was what the Church taught, and the people believed. Hence, there would be no difficulty about one in the flesh visiting the souls in prison, and witnessing torments such as could be understood on earth; and although Dante's presence in Hell, and afterwards in Purgatory, excites the astonishment of some of their inmates, and although many attempts are made to distinguish between him and the ghosts, the distinction is never well made out. The shade or spirit Virgil, "which was once a man," behaves exactly like one: he carries Dante in his arms, is exhausted, pants, turns pale, and so on. The various shades also in like manner suffer as in the flesh, they quarrel, and pommel each other, and continue in Hell much the same sort of existence, and have the same dispositions as on earth. When Dante meets his music master Casella in Purgatory and attempts to embrace him, his arms pass through his body as if it were empty air; and Dante excites surprise because his body casts a shadow on the ground. This subject will be more fully discussed in Chapter VII.

In one of Petrarch's most beautiful sonnets the poet is supposed to have an interview with the shade of Laura in heaven, and she distinctly refers to the future reunion with her body "now by the grave retained." This is consistent with the credal belief in the resurrection of the

body. The following is a translation of the sonnet in question :—

Raised by my thought, I found the region where
 She whom I seek, but here on earth in vain,
 Dwells among those who the third heaven gain,
 And saw her lovelier and less haughty there :
 She took my hand, and said, " In this bright sphere,
 Unless my wish deceive, we meet again.

Lo ! I am she who caused thee strife and pain,
 And closed my day before the eve was near,
 My bliss no human thought can understand :
 I only wait for thee and that fair veil
 So loved by thee, now by the grave retained."
 She ceased, ah why ? and why let loose my hand ?
 Such chaste and tender words could so prevail,
 A little more, I had in heaven remained.

In the *Purgatorio*, xxxi., 107, is a passage which will be again referred to, where it is said, " Ere Beatrice descended to the world," also in one of the Canzoni in the *Vita*, the angels in heaven petition the Heavenly Father that Beatrice may be returned to them, as so much beauty and virtue ought not to remain on the earth. Now in the poet's estimation, Beatrice, whether in heaven or on earth, would present to him the same lineaments, so that no argument can be drawn from the corporality of the lady. In heaven she is said to become more and more beautiful from gazing on the face of God, and it seems to me that it is only on the theory that she is the personification of Divine Wisdom, that the following passage becomes intelligible :—

Not only does the beauty I behold
 Transcend ourselves, but truly I believe
 Its Maker only may enjoy it all.

Having once contemplated the beauty of Divine Wisdom

our poet became enamoured of her, and her smile of recognition must have been more entrancing than that of Duty, of which Wordsworth says :—

Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face.

He never ventured to speak to her, being content to contemplate her beauty in secret and from a distance. He had given her all his heart, and all he desired in return was her recognition, her smile. This made him happy, the withholding of it made him miserable. In this way we may find in every sentence of the *Vita Nuova* a hidden meaning; for having once found the key in the fact that Beatrice, the blessing one, is the personification of Divine Wisdom, we read this apparent piece of autobiography as a fit and proper introduction to the study of the greater work.

In the apocryphal book of *Wisdom*, viii. 7, it is stated that Wisdom teacheth Temperance and Prudence, Justice and Fortitude. In *Purgatorio*, xxxi., 106, it is stated that these virtues were assigned to Beatrice as her handmaids in heaven :—

We here are nymphs, and in the heaven are stars;
Ere Beatrice descended to the world,
We as her handmaids were appointed her.

It does not seem to be straining probability too much to suppose that the gentle band in the following sonnet consisted of Beatrice and her handmaids, while Love that appeared to the poet in the vision, and is here led by Beatrice, is properly the Spirit of holiness, or even the Holy Spirit, or, as Dante says in another sonnet, "our Lord's name, which is Love":—

Di Donne io vidi una gentile schiera.
It was on All Saints' Day that's just gone by,
I saw some ladies pass—a gentle band,

And she, who chief seemed of that company,
Came forward, leading Love on her right hand.
Her eyes shone forth with so much brilliancy,
As of a spirit from celestial land ;
And as I gazed with more persistency,
An Angel seemed before my sight to stand.
On him who's worthy meekly she bestowed
Her salutation, with a look benign ;
So that his heart with goodness overflowed ;
She surely comes from heaven—a thing divine,
And for our good on earth has her abode ;
So blest is he who near her may remain.

The marvellous vision that Dante describes, in which Love appeared like one full of joy, with the poet's heart in his hand, and on his arm Beatrice asleep, wrapped in a mantle ; his waking her, and making her eat Dante's heart, and then ascending with her on high : all this points to Divine Wisdom steeped in the sleep of mortal life ; the mantle round her, her temporary embodiment ; Divine Wisdom by eating, absorbed his life into her own, so that henceforth he lived in her, and as described in the *Paradiso*, he lives on her looks, her words, her smiles.

The evidence in the *Vita* is sufficient to justify the statement that Beatrice descended from heaven to earth, under the name of Wisdom, doing the very things, and exciting the same wonder and admiration described in the Old Testament, and in Dante's allegory. The poetical image boldly represents that while Beatrice, or Wisdom, was on the earth, she was sadly missed in heaven ; for how could the celestial region be complete in the absence of Divine Wisdom ? Whereupon the angels and blessed saints besought the Heavenly Father to restore her to them.

If the reader will turn to the Canzone in the *Vita* beginning with these words :—

Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore,

he may read from the angels' petition such words as these:—

*Lo Cielo che non have altro difetto
Che d'aver lei, al suo Signor la chiede.
Heav'n which hath no defect in any wise,
Save lack of her, demands her of its king.
Each Saint for her is loud petitioning,
While Pity only doth our cause defend.
For God, thus speaking, doth of her intend—
“ My well-beloved,* suffer patiently
Your hope † to wait my pleasure, there where He ‡
Who dreads to lose her dwells ; who shall descend
To the accursed souls in hell, and cry,
I have beheld the hope of Saints on high.”*

The various qualities which the Apocryphal Book applies to Wisdom Dante attributes to Beatrice. Wisdom is a loving spirit, glorious, easily seen of them that love her, and found of such as seek her ; that to think of her is perfection of wisdom ; that she goeth about seeking such as are worthy of her, showing herself favourably unto them in the ways, and meeteth them in every thought ; that the beginning of her is the desire of discipline, and the care of discipline is love, and love is the keeping of her laws. Compare this language with that of the *Vita*, and it will be found to be identical. Dante first announced Beatrice as the glorious Lady of his mind ; that she appeared to him as such ; that the first time he ever heard her voice was in the street ; that she made herself known to him, and the thought of her constrained him frequently to go and seek her. Her influence

* The Angels.

† Beatrice.

‡ Dante.

on those who saw her was such that she did not seem to be the daughter of man, but of God.

In the Comedy the parallelism is even more marked. In the Bible Wisdom "is the breath of the power of God." In the second canto of the *Inferno* Beatrice is addressed as "the true praise of God" (*Beatrice, loda di Dio vera*!), and Virgil says that through her alone the human race excelleth. In the *Purgatorio*, she is addressed as "the light and glory of the human race;" her mouth is described in the *Paradiso* as "the fount whence springs all truth." Wisdom is "the brightness of the everlasting light." Beatrice is described as "the splendour of the everlasting light." Wisdom is "more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of the stars." The eye of Beatrice shone "brighter than the star." Her eyes are "the living seals of every beauty." Wisdom "maketh all things new." Beatrice was the cause of the new or regenerate life in Dante; for it was, indeed, a new life to our poet when he first recognised Divine Wisdom. Hence, we may dismiss the elaborate arguments which would prove the *Vita Nuova* to be the early life, and not the new and regenerate life.

The Bible says again:—"And in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God and prophets." Dante was a prophet, and wrote as such. "God loveth none but him that dwelleth with wisdom." Hence Dante, forsaking Beatrice, fell under the divine displeasure. "So low he fell," says Beatrice in the *Purgatorio* :—

So low he fell, that all appliances
For his salvation were already short,
Save showing him the people of perdition.
For this I visited the gates of death,
And unto him, who so far up has led him,
My intercessions were with weeping borne.

In other words, Divine Wisdom, contemplating a soul that had gone astray, recovered him by making him feel the horrors of Hell, the purifying influence of Purgatory, and the complete happiness of Paradise.

Again, Wisdom is not subject to hurt. Beatrice descends into Hell to find out Virgil, and declares that

Its misery doth not me attain,
Nor flame of this same burning me assail.

The Bible says :—"For her sake I shall have estimation among the multitudes, and honour with the elders, though I be young." This is exactly what Dante obtained through Beatrice. "Moreover, by means of her I shall obtain immortality, and leave behind me an everlasting memorial to them that come after me." This also is what Dante desired to do, and through Beatrice he effected.

Some commentators suppose that Beatrice is a figure intended for Theology; but, as Dr. Barlow remarks, "between Divine Wisdom or *Sapienza* and Theology, there can be no just comparison. *Sapienza* is the Wisdom of God *per se*, or the perfect knowledge of divine truths, as they exist in Deity. Theology is merely the derived conception of these truths, as they are received and held by human minds and expressed in human formulæ." And the old commentator Buti remarks that "many have been great theologians, who have been damned, not beatified."

Beatrice, then, represents Divine Wisdom; Virgil, Dante's master and guide, represents human wisdom, unenlightened by the Divine; and as a knowledge of Divine truths is vouchsafed only to those who give themselves to the meditation and contemplation of them, so Beatrice's place in Heaven is next to that of Rachel, the symbol among the Hebrews of the contemplative life. But

although Beatrice takes the place of Sapienza, and is so in a general sense, as the cause of human happiness universally, yet with reference to the poet, she is so much of Divine Wisdom as was vouchsafed to him for his salvation and glory ; just as the *Sapienza* of Solomon was so much of the Divine Wisdom as he was able to receive and comprehend.

Dante says in the *Paradiso*, Canto xviii:—

While the eternal pleasure, which direct
 Rayed upon Beatrice, from her fair face
 Contented me with its reflected aspect,
 Conquering me with the radiance of a smile,
 She said to me, " Turn thee about and listen ;
 Not in mine eyes alone is Paradise."

Dante's guide to eternal felicity reminds him that Paradise is not to be found even in the eyes of Divine Wisdom alone, but is only reflected therefrom, and that he must seek the reality—the greater glory to which those eyes are guiding him. Divine Wisdom is impersonal, but the poet, following the example of Scripture, depicts it in a visible female form, the most lovely his imagination could create, and exalting her beauty and influence above all created things. In his great poem he desires that all his readers should realise the influence of such a heavenly guide.

Without altogether adopting the theory of the elder Rossetti, and of some others, which regards as purely poetical creations the Beatrice of Dante, the Giovanna of Cavalcante, the Selvaggia of Cino, the Laura of Petrarch, and the Fiammetta of Boccaccio, it may be admitted that the piously inclined boy of nine actually did see a beautiful child named Beatrice, and thus, as it were, caught sight of the idea which through nine years of silence developed into the image of his most glorious Lady, Divine Wisdom. But

however realistic one may wish to be, there is a passage which occurs early in the *Vita* on which, as Gabriel Rossetti says, "all the commentators seem helpless, turning it about, and sometimes adopting alterations not to be found in any ancient manuscript of the work." The passage runs thus :— "*La gloriosa donna della mia mente, la quale fu chiamata da molti Beatrice, i quali non sapeano che si chiamare*" (The glorious lady of my mind, who was called Beatrice by many who knew not how she was called). Mr. Rossetti's opinion on this passage must of course be received with respect, but it does not strike me as satisfactory. He says, "May not the meaning be merely that any person looking on so noble and lovely a creation, without knowledge of her name, must have spontaneously called her Beatrice, *i.e.*, the giver of blessing?" Fraticelli (*Opere Minori di Dante*, 1861, II., 51) has a long note on the subject, containing a number of suggestions. One such is that the original reading should be *e quali* instead of *i quali*, which would mean, "and some knew her by no other name" than her Christian name. It is stated that there was a custom in Italy of calling those distinguished by rank, beauty, or talent, by their Christian name only; and that Beatrice, who really possessed all that is given to mortals both physically and intellectually, should have had this distinction, is therefore not to be wondered at. But the reference is here not to a beautiful woman, but to a child, not yet nine years of age, who on the theory that she was a real person, would not be called Beatrice by those who did not know her, but would be called Beatrice Portinari by those who did.

Dante, himself, however, knew that his book contained enigmas, for when he sent a copy of it to his old master, Brunetto Latini, he accompanied it with a sonnet, of which

the following translation, as well as the note, are by Mr. Gabriel Rossetti :—

Master Brunetto, this, my little maid,
 Is come to spend her Easter-tide with you ;
 Not that she reckons feasting as her due,—
 Whose need is hardly to be fed, but read,
 Not in a hurry can her sense be weigh'd,
 Nor mid the jests of any noisy crew :
 Ah ! and she wants a little coaxing too
 Before she'll get into another's head.
 But if you do not find her meaning clear,
 You've many Brother Alberts* hard at hand,
 Whose wisdom will respond to any call.
 Consult with them, and do not laugh at her ;
 And if she still is hard to understand,
 Apply to Master Janus last of all.

Dante was greatly influenced by the astrology and the general defective science of his age, and he gave profound attention to minute details, and was often straining after irrelevant coincidences. Thus, he has a long passage on the mysteries of the number Nine. Beatrice died on the ninth day of the month, which, according to the Syrian calendar, was the ninth month of the year, and the year itself was that in which the perfect number Ten reached its ninth completion in the century—that is, it was the year 1290. The poet first saw Beatrice when she was in her ninth year ; he wrote his first sonnet in her honour after the lapse of another nine years ; and her first salutation was made to him in the ninth hour of the day. His dream of her in sickness happened on the ninth day after he had

* Probably in allusion to Albert of Cologne, Giano (Janus), which follows, was in use as an Italian name, as, for instance, Giano della Bella ; but it seems probable that Dante is merely playfully advising his preceptor to avail himself of the twofold insight of Janus the double-faced.

been taken ill. In this recurrence of the number nine he sees a deep and mystical significance. The number of the spheres that move is nine, and thus all the celestial influences were united in favourable conjunction at her birth. The root of nine is three, and the Trinity is three; therefore, Beatrice was continually accompanied by the number nine to show that she was herself a nine, that is, a miracle, the root whereof was nought but the marvellous Trinity. Such details are spread out at considerable length, but the above will give a sufficient account of them so far as relates to Beatrice. But he extends the magical number to his great poem, which is written in *terza rima* or threefold rhyme; it is divided into three parts, and each part is again subdivided in its structure into three. The whole number of cantos is one hundred, the perfect number ten multiplied into itself; but reckoning the first canto of the *Inferno* as an introduction or prelude, which it really is, each part consists of thirty-three cantos, or ninety-nine in all, and so the favourite mystic numbers re-appear.

Dante gives to the region of departed souls a general symmetry of form and arrangement. The place of purgation holds a sort of inverse ratio to the place of perdition, and pardonable sins, which in the former are repented of, are never forgiven when combined with malevolence. There are nine circles in each, and there are also nine celestial spheres allotted to the heavenly virtues, with a tenth sphere, which is the heaven of God's visible presence.

CHAPTER VI.

DANTE AND BEATRICE.

FIFTY-TWO years after the death of Dante, Boccaccio wrote his life. It contains much curious matter, that lies rather in the dim region of conjecture, than in sober history or biography. Other biographers have more or less adopted this source, impelled thereto by the scantiness of material to be found elsewhere. The author mingles dreams and ghostly apparitions with his more sober statements, so as to justify Aretino's remark that it is only fit for the *Decamerone*; while Bruni characterises it as weak, and its statements very far removed from the truth. Scartazzini says that instead of a sober biography, the author has written a romance, and Dr. Barlow remarks that Beatrice not having become Dante's wife, shows on the best inductive evidence that we can have, that the story of their loves as related by Boccaccio has no foundation in fact. It may further be added, that Dante nowhere mentions the name of Portinari.

Such statements as those made by Boccaccio, coupled with the use of the name of Beatrice, have led many to regard the *Vita* as a sublimated love story; whereas we may do well to accept the statement of the commentator, Landino, to the effect that the reason why the poet was so much aided by the name, was that Beatrice signifies full of

beatitude (*perche beatrice significa piena di beatitudine*), so also Benvenuto da Imola (who opened his course of lectures on the *Divine Comedy* at Bologna in 1375), attached little importance to the poet's words in the *Vita Nuova*, compared with the deeper and more important signification intended by them. He goes on to say that according to the letter, Beatrice was a lady beloved by Dante; but she is really taken from Holy Scripture, with which Dante was enamoured from his youth; but in order to assist the fiction, he called her by a well-known name, and always referred to her in bodily form. Buti, the most valuable of all the commentators, whose work was completed in 1385, says:—*Lo nostro autore infine la sua puerizia prese vaghezza per piacere della Santa Scrittura, e però a finto che s'inamorasse di Beatrice.* In fact, the earliest commentators, such as Jacopo della Lana, 1330-2, and Dante's son Pietro, 1340, and others already quoted, no more perceived a real lady concealed under the figurative than, as Dr. Barlow remarks, did the expounders of the Bible a lady beloved by Solomon under the material aspect of Divine Wisdom.

Dante was not only well acquainted with Holy Scripture, but, as his son Pietro stated, one of his father's favourite books was Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ*. This treatise was written while the author was in prison, under sentence of death, A.D. 526, and he represents philosophy under the form of a beautiful woman who consoles him in his affliction. This suggested to Dante the idea of Beatrice. As we learn from the commentary ascribed to Pietro Alighieri, Beatrice is a Christian version of the philosophy of Boëthius, *Et Boethius in primo in personâ Philosophiæ metaphysiçæ in quâ hæc Beatrix figuratur.* Thus we see that Dante worked out dramatically the idea of Boëthius

and his consolations by transferring the idea to the Wisdom of the Old Testament, and he clothed Beatrice with the charms of the beautiful and beloved woman, through whom he found consolation in misfortune, and imperishable fame.

One of the most severe of modern commentators on Dante (and also on Petrarch), Biagioli, adopts a view similar to the above. He regards Dante as man with his natural reason, Virgil as the science of human things, Beatrice as the science of divine things, or the philosophy of Boëthius Christianised, *Quella stessa Donna che fu di Boezio consolatrice*. Thus we have in Beatrice an idealism transformed into a realism, just as Boethius endeavoured to give substantive form to the spiritual region, and to impart a personal reality to the philosophy which was raising him to heaven.

It has been objected that the impassioned language of the *Vita* could refer only to a real person, and not to a personified quality. This objection, if just, would apply to all allegories, including "The Pilgrim's Progress," which produces the effect of reality by the introduction of commonplace details. In the *Convito*, Dante uses impassioned language with reference to Philosophy, which he metamorphoses into a beautiful woman, full of compassion, *Figlia di Dio, regina di tutto, nobilissima e bellissima Filosofia*.

But the language of the Old Testament, with reference to Wisdom, is also impassioned, as may be seen from the specimens already quoted. There are, however, some critics who reject the evidence which identifies Beatrice with Divine Wisdom. The elder Rossetti, for example, read political matter into the poetry of the Renaissance. AMOR, for instance, must be read in the reverse, and we then have ROMA, the seat of the Papacy. So he made Beatrice a personification of the Holy Roman Empire.

Francesco Perez made her the symbol of the active intelligence. Bartoli made her not a real but an ideal woman. Father Gietmann, S.J., made her the symbol of Holy Church. Scartazzini would have no difficulty in forming a consistent theory as to the nature of Beatrice, were it not for the impertinent intrusion of Boccaccio, whose life of Dante he regards as a product of the novelist's luxuriant fancy, to which no importance is to be attached. Nevertheless, Boccaccio confronts us with the important facts or statements that Beatrice was Dante's neighbour, the fair daughter of Folco Portinari, and he repeats this statement in his commentary, and he appeals to a person worthy of credit from whom he had the story. He further states that she was married to Simone di Bardi, and was named as his wife in her father's will, bearing date January 15th, 1288; but what Scartazzini wants to prove is that the object of Dante's affection could not have been a married woman.

It must be borne in mind that Dante received his first impression of Beatrice when he was nine, and she eight years of age, and that he had nine or ten years to nurse his ideal before the lady was married, and that the ideal was constantly growing in intensity is evident from such expressions as the following :—"When she approached me from any quarter, through my hope of her wondrous greeting, I had no enemy left. Rather, a flame of charity came over me, which made me pardon whosoever had offended me, and if one had then asked me concerning anything, my only answer would have been love, with a countenance clad in humility." Scartazzini goes on to say that "his beloved is for him the destroyer of all evil, and the queen of all virtue; the influence of her beauty is such that he strives to clothe himself with noble thoughts, love, and faith. When

human weakness almost overpowers him, it is her image that awakens him, and recalls him when he has already gone astray. Her image gives him new strength when he is on the point of letting his courage fail, or is growing weary and shrinking from danger. For her sake he turned his back upon the common herd, and fled from their pastures. She became his guide to heaven, even to God Himself, and when he thought on her he beheld the realm of the blessed; and yet, exclaims our critic, she who became his guide to virtue and to God, the guardian angel of his life, was in reality another man's wedded wife! This idea is too monstrous to be credited.*

Another competent critic, Dr. Franz Hettinger, Professor of Theology at the University of Wurzburg, after alluding to the impression made by Beatrice on the boy of nine, remarks that Dante's love for her was wholly ideal, impelling him ever to what was great and noble. "The fact of his devotion to her as his ideal continuing both after her marriage and his own with Gemma Donati, in 1293, is open to misapprehension, but is fully explained by the usages of mediæval chivalry, which the Troubadours had brought from France to Italy. The homage which knights and minstrels paid to their ladies had nothing to do with merely human love or natural ties. Dante and Beatrice met in a region

* A parallel case is that of the Laura of Petrarch, who is reported by the Abbé de Sade (1764 and 1767) to be a married lady of Avignon, and the mother of a numerous family, whereas the language of Petrarch's Sonnets and the testimony of early writers, such as Gesualdo (1541), are sufficient to prove that Laura was not married, and that she died early :—

E compie' mia giornata innanzi sera.

The subject is carefully examined in an essay "On the Identification of Laura" in the Appendix to my book on the Sonnet, 1874.

which was purely spiritual. . . . The tone of his poetry points to the same conclusion, it bears no trace of the light-hearted gallantry common to the Provençal minstrelsy, but is marked by a religious earnestness. . . . After the death of Beatrice, his love for her, far from dying, only became more wholly spiritualised ; all his higher life fastens itself on Beatrice. She is to him the symbol of the Divine Wisdom and Love ; she leads him into Paradise, and shows him the secrets of the life beyond the grave. Between two and three years after the death of Beatrice our poet was unfaithful to his ideal. He says in the *Vita* :—‘ Having sat for some space sorely in thought because of the time that was now past, I was so filled with dolorous imaginings that it became outwardly manifest in my altered countenance. Whereupon, feeling this, and being in dread lest any should have seen me, I lifted my eyes to look, and then perceived a young and very beautiful lady, who was gazing upon me from a window, with a gaze so full of pity, that the very sum of all pity seemed gathered together in her. And seeing that unhappy persons, when they beget compassion in others, are then most moved to weeping, as though they also felt pity for themselves, it came to pass that mine eyes began to be inclined to tears. . . . It happened after this, that whenever I was seen of this lady, she became pale and of a piteous countenance, as though it had been with love ; whereby she reminded me many times of my own most noble lady, who was wont to be of a like paleness. And I know that often, when I could not weep or otherwise give ease to my anguish, I went to look upon this lady, and the mere sight of her seemed to bring tears to my eyes. . . . At length, by the constant sight of her, my eyes began to be gladdened overmuch with her company.’ ”

The reader need scarcely be informed that if a real lady is here intended, she soon became transformed into the allegorical representative of philosophy, in which Dante found consolation after the death of Beatrice. But his own account is that it was not until after a prolonged conflict that he again became master of himself. He says : "There rose up in me on a certain day, about the ninth hour, a strong visible phantasy, wherein I seemed to behold the most precious Beatrice, clad in that red raiment which she had worn when I first beheld her ; also she appeared to me of the same tender age as then. Whereupon I fell into a deep thought of her ; and my memory ran back according to the order of time on all those matters in which she had borne a part ; and my heart began painfully to repent of the desire by which it had so readily let itself be possessed during so many days, contrary to the constancy of reason. And so I drove away disordered desire, and turned with my whole mind once more to the most noble Beatrice." Then follows that eloquent concluding passage of the *Vita* which has been already quoted.

In connection with the lady at the window may be mentioned one of those odd cases, in which the poet is figurative and some of his critics are literal. Dante says that he often sat up all night contemplating the house of his beloved. This has led curious inquirers to state that Beatrice and Dante "lived within fifty yards of each other," and they supposed that our poet was so absurd as to sit up all night in order to gaze at the house of the Portinaris, whereas he simply means that he sat up all night studying philosophy.

It has been remarked that the Old Testament style of personification is foreign to Dante's style, whereas it seems to me to be identical with it. I admit that Divine Wisdom

is impersonal, but Dante, following the example of Scripture, depicts it in a visible female form of surpassing loveliness, and exerting a marvellous influence on all who could catch even a glimpse of her. In the *Commedia*, the Gentle Lady is Divine Mercy; Lucia is Enlightening Grace; the ancient Rachel is the contemplative life, and so on with a crowd of other cases, among which may be mentioned that towards the end of the thirtieth canto of the *Purgatorio*, Beatrice appears and identifies herself with the Beatrice of the *Vita*:—

*Questi fu tal nella sua vita nuova,
Virtualmente, ch' ogni abito destio,
Fatto averebbe in lui mirabil prova.*

* * * * *

*Alcun tempo il sostenni col mio volto;
Mostrando gli occhi giovinetti a lui,
Meco il menava in dritta parte volto.*

Such had this man become in his new life
Potentially, that every righteous habit
Would have made admirable proof in him;

* * * * *

Some time did I sustain him with my look;
Revealing unto him my youthful eyes,
I led him with me turned in the right way.

Voltaire said that the reason why Dante is so little understood is that he has too many commentators. However this may be, the attempt to define the relation of Dante to Beatrice leads the enquirer into such a tangled mass of detail, that it is like wandering in "the dark forest where

The beaten path direct had gone astray."

But the point in question may be considered under two heads, namely, Was Beatrice a real woman of the city of Florence with whom Dante fell in love, or was she the

personification of Divine Wisdom under the form of a beautiful woman whom Dante worshipped? If the first question be answered in the affirmative, Beatrice acted like a jealous woman, venting her spite against her rival, and even calling her names, such as *Pargoletta** (which Longfellow translates, "little girl"); or if the second question be so answered, Beatrice in the person of Divine Wisdom ex-

* As an illustration of the diversity of opinion among commentators, the following example from Scartazzini may suffice :—According to Landino, the *pargoletta* was intended by Dante to mean "fallacious demonstrations." So far as I understand the figurative language of L'Ottimo, the ladies mentioned in Dante's poems were ideal. Pietro Alighieri and two others make out this *pargoletta* to be Poetic Art, to follow which he had left Beatrice, or Theology, as they explain it. Dionisi proclaims this view to be false. Benvenuto da Imola and three others refer the *pargoletta* to one Gentucca Lucchese; but it has been shown that when Dante made his mystical journey he had not seen Gentucca. According to Buti, *pargoletta* does not mean a real person, but rather the childishness and inadvertency of extreme youth. Biscioni is of opinion that the work of the *Convito* was the *pargoletta* which distracted Dante's mind from the study of Theology. Cary believes that the *pargoletta* was Gemma Donati, the wife of Dante. But Scartazzini adds that for the Poet to confess himself in the wrong for having taken a wife is absurd! According to Kanneg, the allusion is to the gentle lady whom Dante loved after the death of Beatrice. Bergmann considers the *pargoletta* to be a symbolical personage, representing Philosophy or Human Wisdom.

Scartazzini does not quote Witte on this subject, although in his *Erläuterungen* the latter has an elaborate note in five pages. His conclusion is that the *Convito* is sufficient to explain the difficulties connected with this point both in the *Vita* and the *Commedia*. He supposes that the reproaches of Beatrice referred to his preference for a time for human philosophy to the neglect of the Divine Wisdom which Beatrice represented. Moreover, at the time when the *Purgatorio* was written, Dante felt himself less capable of setting his affections on heavenly things than on earthly, and hence he puts into the mouth of Beatrice reproaches which at first sight appear to be more severe than the occasion warrants.

presses her scornful surprise that Dante should choose for his second love so inferior a human product as philosophy.

*Quando di carne a spirto era salita,
E bellezza e virtù cresciuta m'era,
Fu 'io a lui men cara e men gradita ;*

Purg. xxx., 127.

When from the flesh to spirit I ascended,
And beauty and virtue were in me increased,
I was to him less dear and less delightful ;

*because she has
returned to the
realm of the
Divine*

Some critics regard the *Vita Nuova* as a real history, not on account of the rhapsodies of a sensitive, imaginative boy in love with a beautiful girl, but on account of the commonplace details which are scattered through the narrative. But it must be remembered that this book was composed by an accomplished man of genius, at the age of twenty-seven, and that anticipating De Foe's method, he imparted an air of reality to his narrative by the introduction of those very details, which seem to have misled the critical judgment of some commentators. Some of the earlier as well as some recent critics regard the *Vita* as pure fiction, not history. Hettinger looks upon it as a story of ideal love. Scartazzini says :—"In the *Vita Nuova* we have a poetical work of art, and not a historical representation of objective facts."

It is quite clear from the *Convito*, or Banquet, that Dante sought and found consolation in philosophy, which, according to his allegorical method, he represents as a gentle lady, a second Beatrice, and the various kinds of knowledge that now engage his attention he represents as a banquet. And the high estimation in which he holds it may be gathered from this remark :—

"Oh, blessed are those few who sit at that table where the bread of the angels is eaten, and wretched they who share their food with the beasts." In another passage, he says that "Boëthius and Tully led him by the sweetness of their

love—that is upon the study of that most noble lady, Philosophy, who truly is a wonderful lady, adorned with dignity, admirable in knowledge, the glory of freedom, &c. And so I say and affirm that the lady of whom I became enamoured, after my first love, was that fairest and most noble dame of the Emperor of the Universe, to whom Pythagoras gave the name of Philosophy.” There is also a passage which is remarkable for the time at which it was written, and is apparently more applicable to modern science than to that of the fourteenth century:—

“How are we to know what is God’s will from his works, for though his signet may be hidden, yet the wax that he stamps bears open testimony.”

It is clear from a number of passages that the Beatrice of the *Vita* and of the *Commedia* is not the Beatrice of the *Convito*. To quote only one passage, he says that he would speak no more of that living Beatrice, now in bliss ; that is, he would speak only of the allegorical Beatrice, the symbol of Wisdom. The passage already quoted from the *Purgatorio*, xxx., also proves the same point. But in the *Commedia* he constantly shows his love for Philosophy, and does not give himself up entirely to Divine Wisdom, until he has drunk of Lethe.

I think it is Scartazzini who remarks that Dante in all stages of his life was a genuine Christian, and faithful son of the Church in which he was born and brought up. He is always in a state of constant development and progress, and yet another man in his second stage, and yet another in his third ; but always true to himself, always developing in normal lines, and therefore always the same.

Some suppose that the compassionate lady at the window was Gemma Donati, whom Dante afterwards married. But this is not consistent with the statements in the *Vita Nuova*.

It is probably true that Dante was for a short time fascinated by her. He even thought that she might be sent to render his life more tranquil. But the appearance of Beatrice to him in a vision dispelled the passing fancy. "And I say that from that time I began to think of her, with my heart so overwhelmed with shame that it was often manifested by my sighs ; nay, many of them as they escaped from me spake that which was my heart's meditation, the name of that beauteous person, and the manner in which she had departed from us." But as we find from the *Convito* ii., 13, he found consolation in Boëthius and Tully. "As it happens that a man goes seeking silver, and far from his design finds gold, which hidden causes yield him, not perchance without God's guidance, so I who sought for consolation, found not only comfort for my tears, but also words of authors, and of science, and of books, weighing the which I judged well that philosophy, the lady of these authors, of these sciences, of these books, was a thing supreme. And I imagined her made in the form of a gentle lady, nor could I imagine her otherwise than compassionate ; wherefore so truly did I gaze upon her with adoring eyes, that I could scarcely turn myself away. And having thus imagined her, I began to go where she displayed her very self ; that is, in the schools of the religious, and the disputations of the philosophers, so that in that time, about thirty months, I began so much to feel her sweetness that her love chased away and destroyed all other thoughts in me."

The details given in the present and the two preceding chapters seem to justify the following conclusions :—

I. That the Beatrice of the *Vita Nuova* may have been

a real person ; that the name suggested to Dante the Divine Wisdom of the Old Testament ; that the remarkable qualities assigned to her he transferred to Beatrice, including in his narrative certain familiar and homely details in order to give an air of reality to his allegory.

II. That the idea of the *Divine Comedy* is clearly foreshadowed in the *Vita Nuova*.

III. That in order to prepare for this great work Dante studied theology, philosophy, and the sciences representing philosophy, under the form of a beautiful, compassionate woman.

IV. That the reproaches of Beatrice in the concluding cantos of the *Purgatorio* do not refer to Dante's love of another woman, as many suppose, for that would lead to this absurdity (if Boccaccio's statement that Beatrice was married be true), namely, that Beatrice was in love with another woman's husband, and that Dante was in love with another man's wife.

V. That the reproaches of Beatrice simply refer to Dante's abandonment of Divine Wisdom for an inferior object, namely, Philosophy ; as Beatrice expresses it, "made me less dear and less delightful," as in the passage already quoted.

VI. That such an expression as

Ere Beatrice descended to the world,

can only mean that Divine Wisdom descended from heaven to earth, as in the *Vita* ; and the expression addressed to Beatrice, "True praise of God !" can only refer to Divine Wisdom in Heaven.

CHAPTER VII.

BODY AND SPIRIT.

IN my study of the *Divine Comedy* I have always been confronted with a difficulty which I have not seen noticed by the numerous commentators on this great poem. I refer to the distinction between the corporeal and the spiritual, the material and immaterial, the substance and the shade. In his opening canto, Dante, fleeing in terror from the wild beasts, becomes conscious of the presence of a human form, and he cries out :—

*Miserere di me! gridai a lui,
Qual che tu sia, od ombra od uomo certo.*

I cried to him, "Oh ! pity take on me,
Whate'er thou art, shade or of human race."

And the reply is :—

*Non uomo ; uomo già fui.
Not man : I was man formerly.*

Scartazzini (*Inferno*, 1874, i., 67) thinks it necessary to add a gloss on this passage, "I am no more a man of body and of spirit, such as in fact I have been."

In Canto iii., 88, 89, Charon, refusing to take Dante into his boat, says :—

*Anima viva,
Partiti da cotesti che son morti.*

And thou, a living soul, here me before,
Depart from such as these, for they are dead.

Here again the same commentator, instead of giving the poetical principle, doubtless derived from the *Æneid*, which guided Dante in his distinction between the living and the dead, gives such unnecessary information as the following :—

“*Anima viva*, always united with the mortal body, and not deprived of the true life, namely, of God and His Kingdom. *Morti*, dead in a double sense, corporeally and spiritually, as opposed to the living soul in the preceding line.”

In *Canto xii.*, 82, *Morti* again occurs :—

*Siete voi accorti
Che quel di retro move ciò ch' ei tocca ?
Così non soglion fare i più de' morti,*

“Are ye aware,” he to his company said,

“What the hinder one doth touch, in motion goes ?

Thus are not wont to do the feet of the dead.”

But an extreme case of the immaterial occurs in the *Purgatorio* ii. 79, where the poet saw the shade of his old music master, Casella, coming forward as if to embrace him, and he, wishing to return the embrace, found that his hands went completely through the body of the shade :—

*O ombre vane, fuor che nell'aspetto !
Tre volte retro a lei le mani avvinsi,
E tante mi tornai con esse al petto.*

O shades, that save in aspect empty prove !

Three times behind it I my hands enfold,

And then as often to my breast they move.

And yet this ærial figure, at Dante's request, sang one of his pupil's Canzone with such a gush of melody—

Its sweetness still doth oft within me wake,
My Master, I, and all that did remain,
Of folk, with him appeared so well content,
As if nought else could touch the mind again.

Now it is difficult to conceive vocal organs in a form that was apparently made up of thin air, and yet this difficulty is presented to us again and again, and with even greater effect—as, for example, in Canto xxiii. of the *Inferno*, the immaterial Virgil suddenly snatches up the material Dante, and carries him speedily to a place beyond the pursuit of the demons:—

Ne'er water ran so swift in sluice's line,
As did my Master along that slip of hill,
With me upon his breast he onward sped.

Many more examples of this kind may be quoted; but, on the other hand, the spirits are often treated as if they were still in the flesh, or how can we explain the several punishments they are made to endure? Thus in the *Inferno*, iii., 66, the worthless, or those that lived without infamy and without praise, are stung by flies and wasps, so that blood mingled with tears goes trickling to their feet. Also in Canto vi., the claws of Cerberus rend, flag, and quarter the spirits cruelly.

In such passages it is difficult to reconcile the treatment in one case with that of another. The spirit Casella is composed of thin air; the spirits here referred to must be material, or how could they suffer material injuries? In Canto xiv., for example, a fiery rain descends on the burning sand, and the victims suffer the usual effects of fire.

In Canto xix. the victims, whose feet are aflame, suffer

in like manner, as do those in the lake of boiling pitch, Cantos xxi. and xxii., where one of the demoniacal guards uses his hook on the arm of a victim and tears away a tendon. The hypocrites are made to wear capes of lead, others are bitten by serpents, some are maimed, some are scourged, some are subjected to pestilence and divers diseases, and some are imprisoned in a frozen lake. In short, we have a vast amount of material suffering inflicted upon beings apparently as material as if they were still in life.

According to the theory of the *Divine Comedy*, as soon as a human being dies, he goes to hell or to purgatory or to heaven. This seems to be the theory adopted by the Roman Catholic Church, if I may judge from a small work that was sent to me by a Catholic, who had read my translation of the *Inferno* (1877). It is entitled :—

“Hell (Opened to Christians) to caution them from entering into it. | From the Italian of | The Rev. F. Pinamonti, S.J. | Let them go down alive into hell.—Psalm liv., 16. | That they may not go into it when dead.—St. Bernard. | Dublin : | James Duffey and Co., | 15, Wellington Quay, | and 1a, Paternoster-row, London.”

The book is illustrated with a number of most hideous woodcuts, and, in order to keep the matter constantly before the faithful, it is divided into seven daily portions. The first, for Sunday, opens thus :—

“Consider that the first injustice a soul offers to God is the abusing of the liberty offered her by breaking his commandments, and declaring not to be willing to serve him :—‘Thou saidst, I will not serve,’ Jer. ii. To punish, therefore, so great a boldness, God has framed a prison in the lowest part of the universe, a very suitable place, as the

most remote from heaven. Here, though the place itself be wide enough, the damned will not even have that relief, which either a poor prisoner has in walking between four walls, or a sick man in turning himself in bed, because they shall be bound up like a faggot, and this by reason of the great number of the damned, to whom this great pit will become narrow and strait, as also because the fire itself will be to them like chains and fetters. 'He shall rain snares on sinners; fire and brimstone and the spirit of storms will be part of their cup.'—*Psalm, x.*"

The minute details of suffering described in this little book are too horrible to be quoted further; but enough has been given to show that in the Romish Church the idea of torments inflicted on the material bodies after death remains the same in this century as it was in the time of Dante.

Judging by our knowledge of the decomposition and redistribution of organic matter, the resurrection of the body is not a scientific idea. It is, however, a popular belief as taught in the creeds, but this event is reserved for the Last Day, when body and soul are to be reunited and the final sentence pronounced. Thus Dante, *Purgatorio*, xxx., 13:

Even as the blessed at the final summons
Shall rise up quickened each one from his cavern,
Uplifting light the reinvested flesh.

But in the interval, the soul after death, as soon as it is parted from the body, is reserved in certain localities named in the Bible, and which in the Authorised Version are translated by the word hell. This is unfortunate, as it has been the means of spreading those monstrous ideas of eternal punishment which we find in the *Inferno*, in the tract just quoted, and in the popular belief. In the Old Testament the abode of souls after death is expressed in the original by

the word *Sheol* (sometimes translated "grave," "pit," as well as "hell.") In the Greek it is expressed by Hades, Tartarus, and Gehenna.

The word Tartarus occurs but once in the whole Bible, and that is in 2 Peter, ii., 4 :—"God spared not angels who sinned, but cast them into Tartarus, delivering them over into dens of darkness, to be held in custody unto judgment."

Hades is named five times in the Gospels and Epistles, and refers to that dim region of shadows (*aidns*), to which the spirits of all, good and bad alike, are supposed to pass at death, there to await the final judgment.

The Jews divided this vast under-world into two distinct provinces, separated by a "Great Gulf," the one named Paradise, similar to the Elysian Fields of the heathen poets, and the other Gehenna, answering to their Tartarus. The souls of the righteous occupied the one, those of the wicked the other. In several passages of the New Testament the Revised Version properly substitutes Hades for hell.

Gehenna is the Greek form of the Hebrew Ge Hinnom, or Valley of Hinnom. Solomon made this place his pleasure garden, where he committed idolatry and other abominations, so that to mark his sense of the sinfulness of the place, Josiah caused it to be laid waste and converted into the cesspool of the City of Jerusalem. All kinds of offal were cast out here, so that the blow-fly's eggs produced endless swarms of maggots ("Where their worm dieth not"), and in order to purify the infected air fires were kept constantly burning ("The fire is not quenched."). The frequent references to this place are evidently figurative, and the word is not substituted for hell in the Revised Version, as it should have been in such passages as *Mark* ix., 46 ; *Matt.* x., 28 ; *Luke* xii., 5 ; and *James* iii., 6.

There are few subjects in which a reference to Shakspeare can be considered superfluous, so we may get a further illustration from the Ghost in "Hamlet." The Prince evidently considered that his father's body could not rest in his grave, for he says :—

Let me not burst in ignorance ! but tell
Why thy canonized bones, hearsed in death,
Have burst their cerements ! why the sepulchre,
Wherein we saw thee quietly in-urned,
Hath op'd his ponderous and marble jaws,
To cast thee up again ?

The Ghost explains that he is

Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,
And, for the day, confined to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes done in my days of Nature
Are burnt and purged away.

Here we have the purgatorial fire, as in Dante (*Purgatorio*, xxvii., 49) :—

*Come fui dentro, in un bogliente vetro
Gittato mi sarei per rinfrescarmi,
Tant'era ivi lo incendio senza metro.*

When I was in it, into molten glass
I would have cast me to refresh myself, †
So without measure was the burning there.

Now Dante pointed out, in his letter to his patron Can Grande, that the subject of his poem was the condition of souls after death. He doubtless adopted the doctrine of his Church, as did also the Jesuit whose book is referred to above. The Protestant pulpit has also made free use of the horrors of hell, without waiting for the Day of Judgment. This is surely not in harmony with the teaching of Holy Scripture ; for although we read in Luke xvi. of the rich man being in torments, while Lazarus was safe in Abraham's

bosom, the Revised Version does not place him in hell, but in Hades, where the anguish referred to by Abraham cannot be supposed to have the intensity of that of hell. Nevertheless, the expression "I am in anguish in this flame," and the desire for a drop of cold water, show an amount of suffering sufficient to justify the fervent oratory of the Evangelical pulpit.

In conclusion, I may refer to Revelation xx., 13, and to various other texts in the Revised Version, which have not already been quoted.

CHAPTER VIII.

DANTE'S BONES.

IN 1866 Florence held the sixth centenary festival in honour of Dante, the proceedings of which are described in a pamphlet by Dr. Barlow. In the same year the rival city of Ravenna prepared a counter festival, consequent on the finding and recovery of the bones of the poet. The announcement of the discovery was received at Florence and elsewhere as a capital joke, and it was suggested that the bones of Beatrice would also soon be discovered. All that need be done in this place is to relate the particulars of the discovery, which are abridged from the tenth chapter of Dr. Barlow's work, and appending thereto the criticisms of experts, to leave the reader to form his own opinion upon the matter.

Dante died September 14th, 1321, at the age of fifty-six. The last years of his life were passed at Ravenna under the protection of his friend Guido Novello da Polenta, the nephew of Francesca da Rimini. He was buried in the cemetery of the Franciscans, Guido following as a mourner and pronouncing his funeral oration. His remains were deposited in a marble urn, on which was inscribed an epitaph attributed to Giovanni di Virgilio. The first sepulchre was meant only as a temporary one, but Guido

being soon after driven from Ravenna, and dying young, the more noble monument which he intended to raise was never erected. In 1483 a marble monument designed by Pietro Lombardi, on which was the poet's portrait in *basso-relievo* and a new epitaph, was erected. In 1692 this was restored, and in 1780 the present small temple was added.

How long the poet's remains continued in their original resting place is somewhat doubtful, for although the marble urn in which they had been first deposited remained unaltered for a century and a-half, it is probable that the bones were secretly removed a few years afterwards on the approach of the Pope's legate, who intended to have them disinterred, excommunicated, and burnt. After this they may have been restored to the tomb until new perils induced the friars of the convent to abstract and conceal them. This may have been in 1519, when the Florentines desired to have the bones, in order to place them in a new monument which Michael Angelo had offered to erect.

It is also doubtful whether in 1692 the remains of Dante were replaced in the restored tomb, for two years later, when the privilege of sanctuary was denied to the locality, because it contained the bones of a heretic, the friars affirmed that the bones of Dante were no longer there. A note in the handwriting of the sacristan of the convent, found on the cover of a Mass-book once belonging to it, states that when in 1780 the sarcophagus was opened, nothing whatever was found in it.

The small cemetery of the Franciscans occupied the rectangular space formed by the side wall of the convent and that of the church. Here the two portions meet of the *Strada Dante*, also at right angles to each other. The narrower one leads up to the sepulchre, the broader passes

in front. In the line of this frontage was a wall that connected it with the ancient chapel of Braccioforti, behind which was another stone wall that joined on to that of the Rasponi chapel in the church. It was on removing this wall to effect certain improvements that, about ten o'clock in the morning on the 27th of May, 1866, the pick of the workman came in contact with a rough wooden box, the left side of which fell out, and down tumbled a lot of bones. At the angle where the wall behind the chapel of Braccioforti joined on to that of the Rasponi chapel there was found a door bricked up, and it was on removing some of these bricks that the discovery of the rough pine wood box occurred. Many of the bones having fallen out, there was seen on the inside of the bottom plank the following inscription written with a pen:—

DANTIS OSSA

DENUPER REVISÀ DIE 3 JUNIJ

1677.

The box was about 30in. long, 11in. wide, and 12in. deep, it was imperfectly shaped, and the planks roughly nailed together. A second inscription was found on the lid:—

DANTIS OSSA

A ME FR̄ ANTONIO SANTI

hic posita

Ano 1677. Die 18 Octobris.

The city authorities, being informed of the occurrence, hastened to the spot and took charge of the box, examined the bones, made an inventory, and replaced them in the box, which was carried to a place of safety.

The examination showed that they had belonged to a

robust adult male, of an advanced stage of manhood. They were of a darkish red colour, somewhat approaching to black. Their substance was, in general, not obviously altered. A considerable number of the bones of the skeleton were missing. The skull is described as being finely modelled; the occipital region was prominently marked, the frontal was also amply and broadly expanded; the periphery of the head measured 52 cent. 5 mill. The contents of the interior was ascertained by filling the skull with rice, which was found to weigh 1420 grammes, or 3·1321 lb. avoirdupois. It was further noted that there was a want of symmetry in the two halves of the skull, arising probably from the one-sided ossification of the sutures in early life. On comparing the skull with the mask taken after death, the same character was noticed in the conformation of the forehead, the same form of the arches of the eyebrows, of the bridge of the nose, and the same length and shape of the nasal bones.

I need not dwell upon the ceremonies connected with the lying-in-state of these bones and the various functions pertaining to their discovery, except to mention a test which it was supposed would settle the question of the genuineness of these relics. It was determined to open the marble sarcophagus in which the body had been interred, and if this were found to be empty, then the bones in the box would be declared to be those of the poet. Accordingly on the 7th of June, at eight in the morning, in the presence of a large and excited assembly, the covering slab of the sarcophagus was raised, and the urn was found empty, with the exception of a few phalanges, some laurel leaves, and a little putrefied dust. The announcement was received with a shout of joy. On the 26th of June the

bones were carried to Braccioforti, laid in a coffin of walnut wood, covered with zinc, and deposited in their original resting-place.

Having some acquaintance with Dr. Barnard Davies, F.R.S., who had made the human skull his special study, I put to him a few questions on the subject of the Dante relics. In his reply he enclosed a letter addressed to him by Dr. Hermann Welcker, Professor of Anatomy in the University of Halle, on the skull of Dante, from which the following particulars are gathered.

The authenticity of Dante's bones may well be doubted, seeing that they have in the course of centuries experienced so many vicissitudes ; they have, as it is said, after repeated interments, been saved by flight and hidden in an unknown place, then suddenly found again by a peculiar accident. They came to light just at the time when the people of Ravenna desired to celebrate some striking event to counterbalance the festivities of Florence on the occasion of the sixth centenary of the poet. But supposing the remains to be genuine, the comparison of the skull with the mask was said to afford "the same character in the conformation of the forehead, the same form of the arches of the eyebrows, of the bridge of the nose, and the same length and breadth of the nasal bones. But if the skull and the death mask belong to one another, they must show not only corresponding *forms*, but also corresponding *proportions*. The dimensions of the mask must be everywhere *larger*, certainly in various proportions, since the soft parts covering the bones in different divisions of the face are of different thicknesses. Yet everywhere the measures of the mask will be greater." The writer then goes on minutely to compare the reported measure-

ments of the skull with those of the mask in the possession of Professor Witte, and he finds them discordant; hence the mask is not genuine, or the reported measurements are not those of Dante's skull. The mask corresponds with the portraits of Dante. But the writer says :—"I have never been able to think this modelled head was a mere and unaltered death-mask. The same hand that modelled the position of a cap in the manner of a diadem rising upwards may also have employed some art touches here and there upon the face to dissipate the expression of death, and give the whole an appearance of life. Indeed, there are many points to be recognised in this mask which remind us more of the proceedings of art and the technicalities of modelling than of the mere cast of a dead head. On the other hand, I consider that in the neighbourhood of the eyes, at the corners of the mouth, and in some other places, I can perceive marks such as are to be seen in real death-masks; hence this mask may have been a copy of the original death-mask. Against the supposition that the Torregianian head is a death-mask, it might probably be of moment that it reminds one more of the profile portrait of the youthful Dante originating from Giotto than of Raphael's picture of the older man; whilst we should have expected the reverse, that the death-mask would represent the features of the pictures taken in later years. Still there is no ground for assuming that Raphael collated this with any authentic portrait; it is much more probable that he only relied on the traditional likenesses of the manuscripts of the *Divine Comedy*. So we might suppose that the original of the "mask" was a Dante at a period of life between Giotto's and Raphael's portraits, and that the "death-mask" was nothing more than a likeness made in Dante's lifetime.

Professor Welcker suggests a doubt as to whether the art of taking a mask from the face was known six hundred years ago, the oldest masks that he recollects being those of Luther and Tasso. He goes on to compare other dimensions of the skull with those of the mask, and still finds the results discordant. For example, the breadth of the orbital region, according to the Italian Report, is given as 124 *millimètres*. The highest number obtained in the examination of 237 German skulls was 112 *millimètres*. Out of twenty-seven Italian skulls, the mean was 97 *millimètres*. Schiller's skull, which is of great breadth, gives 106. "For the skull of Dante, a man of middle stature, whose head was well proportioned to his body, and whose countenance, according to all the portraits, was of a rather narrow oval form, 124 *millimètres* is an absolutely impossible measure. Open a pair of calipers to 124 *millimètres*, and seek to find amongst thousands of skulls an example, the orbital diameter of which will reach that breadth; or model a bust of Dante, taking that foundation for the dimensions of the diameter of the orbital region of the skull and of the upper face, and a colossal bust would be obtained." Other measurements are criticised in the same manner.

With respect to the *asymmetry* of the skull, the Professor makes a remark which is favourable to the authenticity of the skull. He says:—"If we place the mask so that the upper face is directed straight forward, and glance from the forehead of the mask down to the chin, it is very remarkable that the anterior surface of the strong angular chin deviates to the right. The deviation from the true square line amounts at least to from 12 to 15 degrees. It is singular that the reporters in their assertion, that the skull and the mask exhibited essentially the same characters, did not make

mention of this *obliquity* as a character common to both; but that this skull, which on many other grounds is probably the skull of Dante, and that the mask, which on many other grounds also is likely to be that of Dante, should both agree in a character so rarely occurring, renders the probability greater that both are genuine."

Passing over the phrenological examination of the skull, to which the Professor attaches little or no importance, he goes on to say that in his opinion, "Science still stands too far from a localisation of the actions of the mind in individual working territories of the brain, to venture to bring the talents and powers of a master-spirit into relation with the greater or smaller projection of this or that part of the brain. Even to this day it is not generally recognised that a surpassing spiritual endowment presupposes simply a more largely developed, and consequently heavier brain, than a moderate endowment." The Professor criticises the Italian estimates of the weight of Dante's brain from the quantity of rice which it held. After making the necessary reductions, he considers that "1420 grammes (and not 1550 grammes) must be accepted as the probable weight of Dante's brain." This is less than the weight assigned to Cuvier's brain, 1830 grammes, and many others which are given in his letter in a tabular form. It is remarkable that the weight of the brain of so eminent a genius exceeds the common average only by a small quantity, but in the case of many highly-endowed men the skull has become contracted in consequence of the early obliteration of sutures. The brain of Wilhelm von Humboldt, for example, is without doubt below the average. In the case of Dante, the refusal of the Italian authorities to allow a cast of the skull to be taken is unfortunate, as it prevents all further inquiry.

DANTE'S PORTRAIT.—In 1840 a portrait of Dante was discovered at Florence on the wall of the palace of the Podesta, then used as a prison, where it had been concealed under a coat of whitewash during several centuries. A committee of gentlemen was formed for the purpose of cleaning off the whitewash in the hope of finding some frescoes. Mr. Seymour Kirkup was at the head of this committee, and he employed an artist named Marini, who proceeded to his work in a very rough manner, knocking holes in the wall for the insertion of his scaffolding poles. After working for some weeks a portrait of Dante was discovered, which some suppose to be the work of Giotto, others that of his pupil Daddi. The eye had been injured by a nail driven into the wall.

But on hearing of this important discovery, the Government stepped in, as Mr. Kirkup remarks, either being "afraid we should make some claims to it and carry it away, or they were ashamed of foreigners doing what it was their duty to do." He could not even obtain permission to make a copy, but he found means to get himself shut up in the prison, where he made a drawing and a tracing, and afterwards from the two a *fac simile*, which was given to Lord Vernon, and by him presented to the Arundel Society, which reproduced it in chromo-lithography. This represents the damage to the eye. I have a copy of this print and also a photograph of the figure, after it had been restored.

Mr. Kirkup writes with reference to this restoration:—"See what their meddling has done, and compare that print with the fresco as it now stands or with many prints and copies which have been made since the restoration. Lord Vernon said he almost cried when he compared

it with the fresco, and I do not wonder. That print is the only likeness left which is certain." The Italian Government so far recognised Mr. Kirkup's services as to confer on him the honour of knighthood.

CHAPTER IX.

CARY'S TRANSLATION.

In preparing for the Dante lectures I became acquainted with various translations of the *Divine Comedy* in English, French, German, and Spanish. I gave a critical notice of the English translations in an introductory essay appended to my translation of the *Inferno* (1877). These consist of nine in blank verse, five in rhymed verse, nine in *tersa rima*. Translations of portions by Lord Lyttelton, Mr. Gladstone, and by Mr. Merivale are also noticed.

The elaborate praise that has been bestowed on Cary's translation originated I imagine, with Ugo Foscolo, in an article in the *Quarterly Review* somewhere about 1826, an opinion that has been adopted by many subsequent writers, as well as Foscolo's dictum that blank verse is the only efficient vehicle for representing Dante in English. On comparing Cary's version of the *Inferno* with the original, it seemed to me that he has often failed in the letter and almost entirely in the spirit of the Italian. He has not caught Dante's simplicity of style, his homely language, his use of the most commonplace similes, his power of conveying the terrible in language of the most ordinary kind, his tenderness, his earnestness. On the contrary, he has given him a grand epic air, which is not a feature of the *Inferno*;

he has introduced adjectives and pompous elaborations which do not belong to the text; in short, he fails in the power, sweetness, harmony, and homeliness which belong to this poem. For example, Dante describes in a few graphic words the sinking of a ship in a storm at sea (Canto xxvi.), "The poop rises up, and the prow goes down."

As pleased Another,
Till over us again the sea was closed.

But instead of this simple, forcible mode of expression, Cary has—

So fate decreed,
And over us the blooming billow closed.

At the end of Canto xxv. the original says :—

Thus did I see the seventh bed of sand
Change and transmute, and here let my excuse
Be novelty, if flowers [of speech] my tongue abhors.

Cary dilutes this passage thus :—

So saw I fluctuate in successive change
The unsteady ballast of the seventh hold :
And here if aught my pen hath swerved, events
So strange may be its warrant.

He does not even take the trouble to translate a plain passage correctly. Thus, in Canto iii., referring to the famous inscription, the original is :—

*Queste parole di colore oscuro
Vid' io scritte al sommo d'una porta.*

Such characters in colour dim I mark'd
Over a portal's lofty arch inscribed.

In trying to improve on his author, the translator loses the homely simplicity of the original. Thus, in Canto xvii., "whiter than butter" is elaborated into "of whiter wing than curd," and "a gravid sow" "is a fat swine." The

advice to avoid certain people, "but far from grass be beak," is amplified into—

But be the fresh herb far
From the goat's tooth.

"The sound of beehives" (Canto xvi.) is made,

Resounding like the hum of swarming bees.

In Canto xxxii., "I would express the juice of my conceit more fully" is converted into—

Then might the vein
Of fancy rise full springing.

And where Dante says simply, "Not without fear do I proceed to speak," Cary says grandly—

And with faltering awe I touch
The mighty theme.

"The gnat" (Canto xvi.) is "the shrill gnat," and "fire-flies down along the valley" is—

Fire-flies innumerable spangling o'er the vale.

Mr. Cayley well remarks that Cary,

"being too careful to give his poem a uniformly dignified tone, has adulterated all its franker style with the pomp and stiffness of our traditional epic poems."

He gives an example from Canto vi.:

Se 'l ciel gli addolcia, o lo 'nferno gli attosca
(If heaven doth sweeten, or hell poison them),

is rendered—

If heaven's sweet cup, or poisonous cup of hell
Be to their taste applied.

Lord Macaulay's high estimate of Cary's version, namely, that "there is no other in the world so faithful," does not

seem to me to be consistent with his lordship's methods of acquiring and reading modern languages. He says:—

"My way of learning a language is always to begin with the Bible, which I can read without a dictionary. After a few days passed in this way, I am master of all the common particles, the common rules of Syntax, and a pretty large vocabulary. It was in this way that I learned both Spanish and Portuguese, and I shall try the same course with German."—*Life*, I., 452.

"I read, not as I read at College, but like a man of the world. If I do not know a word, I pass it by, unless it is important to the sense. If I find, as I have of late often found, a passage which refuses to give up its meaning at the second reading, I let it alone."—I., 428.

It is sometimes amusing to compare translations by different hands with the original. I give here a passage from the *Purgatorio* at the opening of the eighth Canto, which is one of the very few examples of sentimental writing in the *Divine Comedy*:—

*Era già l'ora che volge il disio
Ai naviganti, e intenerisce il core
Lo dì ch'han detto ai dolci amici addio ;
E che lo nuovo peregrin d'amore
Punge, se ode squilla di lontano,
Che paia il giorno pianger che si more.*

Tw'as now the hour that wakes to longing who
Sail o'er the sea, and moves the heart tenderly,
The day they've said to their sweet friends, Adieu !
And the new pilgrim pricks to love if he
Should hear from far away a little bell
That seems a-weeping o'er the dying day.

Now was the hour that wakens fond desire
In men at sea, and melts their thoughtful heart,
Who in the morn have bid sweet friends farewell,
And pilgrim newly on his road with love
Thrills, if he hear the vesper bell from far,
That seems to mourn for the expiring day.

—CARY.

Soft hour ! which wakes the wish and melts the heart
Of those who sail the seas, on the first day
When they from their sweet friends are torn apart ;
Or fills with love the pilgrim on his way,
As the far bell of vesper makes him start,
Seeming to weep the dying day's decay ;

BYRON, *Don Juan*, III., 108.

'Twas now the hour that turneth back desire
In those who sail the sea, and melts the heart,
The day they've said to their sweet friends farewell,
And the new pilgrim penetrates with love,
If he doth hear from far away a bell
That seemeth to deplore the dying day.

—LONGFELLOW.

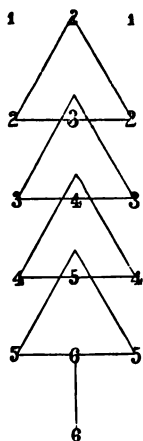
Gekommen war die Stunde, die die Sehnsucht
Der Schiffer weckt, die weicher macht die Herzen
Am Tag, wo sie von lieben Freunden schieden,
Und Liebeswunden schlägt dem Pilgerneuling,
Hört er von Ferne Glockentöne hallen,
Die ob des Tages Tod zu klagen scheinen.

—WITTE.

CHAPTER X.

LA TERZA RIMA.

THE whole poem consists of upwards of fifteen thousand lines in *terza rima*, or tierce rhyme, consisting of tercets, where the last word of the middle line of each gives the rhyme to the first and third lines of the following tercet, so that all the tercets of each canto interpenetrate and continue the action—a sufficient reason against the practice of separating the tercets by means of spaces, which is sometimes done.



The structure of the verse may be represented geometrically, as in the figure, where the three rhymes indicated by the like numerals form the angles of an equilateral triangle, and all these angles interpenetrate throughout the canto. As the first tercet, however, starts the rhymes by its middle line, it follows that the first

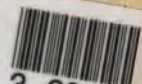
and third lines of the first tercet stand out by themselves as a pair of rhymed lines, and there is a similar pair at the end of each canto.

A great part of the charm of Dante's poem is in this form, which if he did not actually invent, he made it what it had never been before, and has not been since, an instrument of the highest poetical power.

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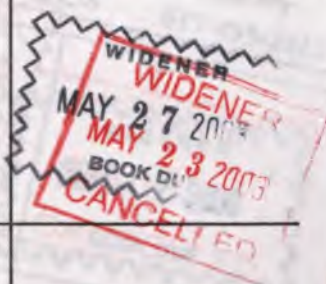


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